

**AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENT ATHLETES AT PREDOMINATELY  
WHITE INSTITUTIONS AND MOTIVATIONAL FACTORS THAT  
INFLUENCE GRADUATE AND PROFESSIONAL DEGREES**

A Dissertation

by

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## **ABSTRACT**

This study highlights African American male student athletes at PWI's, and their motivational factors that influenced persistence into graduate school. The following research questions guided this study: (a) How do African American male student athletes who participated at PWI's describe their educational experiences?; (b) How does participation collegiate sport influence educational experiences of African American male student athletes?; and, (c) How do African American male student athletes describe the experiences that influenced them to attend graduate school?

After the data for this study was analyzed, several themes emerged. Intrinsic motivation, which is defined as the willingness which comes within the individual, major themes of high academic expectations, high athletic expectations, and strong work ethic emerged. Within the theme of strong work ethic, discipline and competitiveness emerged as sub themes. Extrinsic motivation, which is defined as motivation that comes from an external force, major themes of family influence, community involvement/tradition, and social influence emerged. Within the theme of social influence, teamwork and code switching emerged as sub themes.

This study utilizes Critical Race Theory (CRT) is used as a lens to thoroughly examine and explain the athletic and academic experiences of African American student athletes at PWI's. The tenets necessary to explore this study are interest convergence and counter storytelling and were utilized in order to interpret African American athletes and their commitment to athletic superiority and academic achievement while at PWI's.

## **DEDICATION**

Thank you to those who have helped me through not only the process of completing this dissertation, but also to those who have guided me through life as well as through my 10 years of college.

To my mother, for her love, nurturing, and never leaving my side when I needed her the most. To my father who showed me tough love and teaching me how to become a man. Both have set the bar high and have always encouraged me to do the best at every endeavor I have set out to accomplish. You both did the best with what you had and I appreciate you both for your love and support.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### *Introduction*

There is an ongoing national conversation about the connection between athletics and academics in colleges and universities. If an understanding is to be gained, there has to be an understanding of both fields. The importance of connecting disciplines lies within the realities of the two; athletics and academics are two of the most popular and visible entities within the United States. Given their high visibility and popularity, athletics and academics are highly valued, and can be windows into, or a reflection of underlying values, beliefs, and assumptions of specific cultures (Cunningham & Welty-Peachy, 2010). Within every organization, business, entity, institution, and so forth, “ways of practice” are created, and applied both internally and externally. Thus, athletics and academics, when combined with cultural values, reinforce prevalent sentiments regarding acceptable behavior (Edwards, 1973). The values of success, competition, valued means to achieve, and progress, are standards that are culturally derived; therefore athletics and academics will be reflective of the society in which it operates (Edwards, 1973).

Since participation in sport has increased in schools throughout the United States over the past 50 years, the relationship between athletic participation and academic success has been an interesting topic of discussion in both athletics and academe. Despite the large body of literature on positive connections between athletics and academics, there continues to be a growing concern regarding the overemphasis of athletic participation (Dawkins, Braddock, & Celaya, 2008), especially as it relates to African American males.

Additionally, athletics and its prevalence in American media and society endorses and ultimately influences a direct objective for African American males to pursue a career as a professional athlete. For instance, Edwards (1986) argues that the mobility aspirations for many young, African American males, lead them to believe that by placing greater emphasis on sports, they are securing their destiny, which is the fulfillment of a journey to the life of a highly paid, professional athlete. This belief may be reinforced by well-intentioned, but inadequately informed peers, media, and community members. Therefore, athletic participation, rather than academic success, is believed to have a greater impact on African American males.

Accordingly, for many African American males who aspire to become a professional athlete as the ultimate goal, college is only seen as a gateway to professional stardom. Academics only matter to the extent that maintaining eligibility to participate in sports is necessary in order to fulfill athletic expectations (Dawkins, Braddock, & Celaya, 2008). Looking at the percentages of African American collegiate student athletes that make it to the professional ranks, the reality is not as widespread as the belief. Table 1.1 shows the probability of becoming a professional athlete in revenue producing sports (e.g. football, men's and women's basketball):

Sport	Total Number of Athletes	Number of Student Athletes who make it to the Professionally	Percentage
Women's Basketball	16,126	324	.02
Men's Basketball	17,984	540	.03
Football	70,147	5,612	.08

Table 1.1 (Likelihood of Playing Professional Sports)  
(NCAA, 2014).

This information demonstrates the immense competition and distant likelihood of playing professionally for African American males.

In addition to the societal belief that African Americans overemphasize sports and although there is a substantially low amount of student athletes who make it to the professional ranks, there is an ironic underrepresentation of African Americans who participate in collegiate sports. According to the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA), there are 23,173 African American students currently enrolled in higher education who receive either a full or partial athletic scholarship from the college or university in which they are enrolled (NCAA, 2014). African American scholarship athletes make up 21.3 percent of all students receiving athletic scholarships. According to Table 1.2,

Category	Percentage of African Americans
Total Student Population at PWI's	10
Total Number of College Athletes	21
Total Number of Football Players	46
Total Number of Men's Basketball Players	67
Total Number of Women's Basketball Players	47
Total Number of Revenue Producing Sport Athletes	70
Total Number of Athletes who receive scholarships (from PWI's)	1.5

Table 1.2 (Percentages of African American Student Athletes at PWI's) (NCAA, 2014)

Accordingly, the high proportion of African American athletes in collegiate athletics rather than in the general student body, gives scholars and educators the impression that African Americans primarily attend universities based on their athletic talents. Contrastingly, 99.5 percent of African Americans between the ages of 18 and 23 who are in colleges do not participate in sport (Coakley, 2009). For that matter, society gets the impression that many educational institutions, especially Predominately White Institutions (PWI's), thrive on and exploit the athletic talents of African American male student athletes for the benefit of the institution and its national exposure, rather than equally prepare them academically (Byrd et al., 2011).

Educational enterprises are commonly thought to prepare all students, including student athletes, for a future beyond their halls and campuses (Beamon, 2008). However, when current academic statistics and the plight of the African American male student athlete are analyzed, athletic success is clearly valued more than academic success. Whereas athletics and academics are seen through society as primarily positive benefactors for student athletes, the unequal representation between athletic and academic achievement is very apparent within the history of college sport (Donnor, 2005). In addition, African American students, if they do earn a college degree, are more likely to do so once their athletic eligibility has expired (Donnor, 2005). This in turn, creates an academic gap between African American student athletes and White student athletes. As athletics and academics are discussed, a critical examination of the relationship between race, athletics, and academics must be included.

Historically and presently, race related issues continuously surface in the fields of athletics and academics; which creates and sustains tension between races. Since race in American society is something that was first socially constructed by Whites as a mechanism for elevating themselves to a dominant, more superior position in society and relegating their African slaves as subordinate, it is appropriate to use the binary between African Americans and Whites as a focal point when analyzing and discussing race and ethnicity in athletics and academics (Agyemang, DeLorme, & Singer, 2010). Considering centuries of calculated oppression of African Americans at the hands of Whites, which is still manifested today, race continues to be a salient topic in the fields of both.

Although there is a dearth of literature focusing on the “miseducation” of African American student athletes, there are however, outliers, which continue on a path of athletic success, as well as academic success. These African American student athletes exemplify the commitment to excellence both athletically and academically, in the fashion of pursuing graduate and professional degrees. According to Dawkins, Braddock, & Celaya (2008), athletically and academically successful African American student athletes provide an alternate perspective to assess the relationship between athletic participation and academic achievement and future attainment of educational and occupational goals. Furthermore, these student athletes are actively involved in the learning process, devote full attention to their studies, and have a commitment to both their athletic and academic success (Finn, 1993; Newman, Wehlage, & Lamborn, 1992).

While many researchers and practitioners debate whether or not athletics impedes or enhances academic performance, success, and mobility after eligibility, this continuous debate may be misleading. The connection between athletic participation and academic engagement of students may result in both outcomes, along with other possibilities (Dawkins, Braddock, & Celaya, 2008). As stated previously, emphasis on sports may begin early in childhood for African American males (Edwards, 2000); however, the extent to which they become academically engaged may also begin early with complicity from parents, schools, and coaches. While many student athletes believe the path to economic mobility lies solely through professional sports, graduate and professional degrees undoubtedly, are clear fundamental indicators of “well-being” (Harris, 2012), which ultimately entails economic mobility.

While the connection between athletics and academics needs closer examination to understand whether sports impedes or enhances motivation factors to pursue graduate/professional degrees, the need to address their motivational factors which lead to continued education is essential as well. Given the importance of academic achievement, it is vital to include the factors predicting academic success as fully as possible, and done so particularly for groups who fall behind academically (Ou & Reynolds, 2008).

### *Personal Story*

My story has created personal interests for this study. Many life experiences have shaped my perspective on athletics and academics. Most importantly, I am an African American male. Being an African American male, and growing up in suburban areas being an African American, has created and shaped perspectives that are unlike most. This sole quality has prompted the exploration of the qualities and motivations of African American male student athletes.

I have participated in sports throughout my life. I have played numerous sports including basketball, baseball, ran track, and most importantly, I have played football. While playing these sports, many of my opponents and teammates were indeed African American. Although I lived in a suburban area while growing up, I played with and against athletes from many urban, suburban, and rural areas. Competing against these athletes made me a better athlete in my own right.

I consider myself successful in many of my athletic endeavors. I have received numerous awards in K-12; some of the awards include being a two time all district performer, a top 100 athlete in my state, and a top 50 prospect nationally at my position.

Although my K-12 career was decent, I played with and competed against many top athletes who have went on to play at the highest levels as well.

Additionally, I was awarded an athletic scholarship to represent a fairly large PWI in central Texas. My time as an athlete at this college will be remembered as some of the greatest days of my life. Athletically, my coaches have taught me the meaning of hard work. I was able to take the easy way in K-12 because I was simply better than everybody. However, while in college, the competition and level of play had risen tremendously. My sophomore and senior years defined me as an athlete. Simply put, perseverance and dedication are two things that I learned as well as carried over into graduate school. Accordingly, throughout my time there, I was a two year starter at defensive back. I also received a few team awards while playing as well. I also won two conference championships while playing in college. While in college, I was elected to the conference honor roll twice in my career. After my senior year, I decided to become a graduate assistant for the football team. I assisted the coaching staff with the defensive line and the defensive backs.

After my collegiate career was over, I was fortunate enough to play more football for about a year and a half for an arena football team located in Austin, Texas. I was a starter at corner back and safety while playing for this team. In my first season, I had the least amount of explosive plays and touchdowns thrown against me (only one explosive play and one touchdown in 12 games). Also, while playing in this league, I was fortunate enough to play against people who I grew up watching. These experiences have shaped



my respect and admiration for the many athletes in pursuit of excellence and success in their athletic goals.

Academically, I have always been a good student. Much of the success I have had academically can be credited to my parents. Throughout my K-12 life, my parents have always preached that academics was the main priority. Without academics, sports would not exist. I made it a point to succeed academically. I was not the best student but I did fairly well. I was in all Advanced Placement (AP) classes in high school. My parents also monitored my performance closely to say the least. If I needed attention in a certain subject I was told to work harder. If that approach did not work, they assisted me in finding the help I needed in order to succeed. Additionally, I was in the top 20 percent in my graduating class and I was also part of the Honor Society.

It is also worthy to note that I graduated early while playing football collegiately. This granted me the opportunity to play football as well as attend graduate school. Completing graduate school while playing football both at the college and arena levels was not a simple task. Focus, discipline, and dedication were needed in order to be successful in all areas. After my first semester of graduate school, I earned a 3.75 GPA while playing football for a conference championship team. The next semester I earned a 3.33 GPA while playing for a championship team at the arena level.

I continued my education at a research one university. Here, I became a doctoral student in the College of Education and Human Development. During my time here, I have worked with the athletic department in many areas; this includes working with Big 12 and Southeastern Conference (SEC) student athletes academically (i.e., tutoring,

mentoring, advising, campus assistance) while also working with the athletic department financially. This has given me an all-around knowledge base of how athletic departments operate. Also, my research base and focus revolves around student athletes, more specifically, African American student athletes. I have worked with many on-campus organizations that have connected me to not only African American graduate students, but the student body as a whole. Working with these organizations such as the Black Graduate Student Council, Future Former Students, and Kappa Alpha Psi, I have had a chance to grow personally as well as witness others who came after me maximize their potential.

Being immersed in athletics throughout my life, it is fitting to conclude my college life with a study that represents the positives that can arise from participating in athletics. My time in sport has shaped many qualities and characteristics of me that I otherwise would not have received if I was not part of these teams and organizations. Many of the statements my coaches have made to me – some more than 10 years ago – have continued to drive me through this process.

The experiences as an athlete and a graduate student at PWI's have created visions, images, and ideas that have influenced my interests. My time as an athlete has created many perspectives on African American athletes and the athletic arena as a whole. I am grateful for the opportunities that athletics has created. Through the good and bad, being an athlete will always be part of who I am. As a graduate student, especially after football, has influenced my perspective as well. The practice and training that I have endured has been a privilege mentally. Many individuals do not get the chance to experience many of the luxuries that I have been a part of. Although my graduate school days, particularly

while getting my doctorate, have pushed me to my limit, the positives most assuredly outweigh the negatives.

### *Critical Race Theory*

Critical Race Theory (CRT) is an interdisciplinary, race equity methodology that was first derived from the legal field in the 1970's (Delgado & Tate, 1997; Ladson-Billings, 1998). Scholars searched for a way to more directly address race and racism in the United States. Scholars challenged practices in which race and racial power were constructed, represented, and wielded through the law. According to Delgado (1995) and Ladson-Billings (1998), CRT emerged in the 1970's with the early work of Derrick Bell and Alan Freeman, both of whom were deeply distressed over the slow pace of racial reform in the United States. During this time period, theoretical and methodological conventions in the field of law inadequately addressed the complexity with which structural racism influences production of knowledge about marginalized populations and disparities among them. Prevailing philosophies about race has shaped research, but because investigators were not critical about their relationships to their racial social contexts, they were unable to perceive the insidious influence of racism in their work (Ford & Airihenbuwa, 2010). Furthermore within this context, the contributions of people of color who might have challenged underlying assumptions have been largely excluded.

At its most elemental level, CRT can be defined as a critique of racial reform efforts; however, in its fullest elaboration, the CRT framework mixes strategy, research method, and definitional premises (Closson, 2010). According to Taylor, Gillborn, & Ladson-Billings (2009), CRT scholars believe that racial analysis can be used to deepen

understanding of the educational barriers for people, as well as exploring how these barriers are resisted and how to overcome them. CRT, however, was not introduced into the field of education until 1995 (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Tate, 1997). Scholars applied CRT to the educational field by using theoretical and analytical framework in educational research to address the conceptual realities of categories such as school achievement, intelligence, maleness, beauty, intelligence, and science, existing as normative categories of Whiteness, while Blackness is marginalized and categorized as de-legitimate (Ladson-Billings, 2009). Nonetheless, there has clearly been considerable discussion of race and racism in the realm of athletics and academics. CRT is alternately referred to as a theoretical and/or interpretive framework as well a movement: This notion draws together premises and strategies derived largely from critical theory, but related directly to racism, and is being increasingly used by educational scholars to analyze education (Dixson & Rousseau, 2005).

### *Tenets of CRT*

CRT has emerged as an effective framework to challenge racism. Furthermore, CRT has often been called a hybrid discipline, as it draws from a number of relevant disciplines in order to incorporate an interdisciplinary approach to the development of theory and praxis in relation to racism in society (Stovall, 2005). This theory encourages individuals to challenge conventional ideas and practices in a way that brings new tools and ideas into the quest of being critical and inclusive (Hylton, 2009). According to Delgado and Stefancic (2011), CRT challenges past and present institutional arrangements in all aspects of life that racially discriminate, subjugate and depress. Essentially, CRT

examines racism as both a group and individual phenomenon that functions on many levels, and it offers a means by which to identify the functions of racism as an institutional and systematic phenomenon (Stovall, 2005). CRT also reveals various perspectives from which African Americans view and circumnavigate racial and ethnic situations.

According to Ladson-Billings (1998), much of the scholarship of CRT focuses on bringing additional power to discourses of racial justice. CRT seeks to illuminate racial power and subsequent racial hierarchies, analyze their effects, understand why and how they persist, and advance social action to disrupt and alter them (Parsons, Rhodes, and Brown, 2011). Accordingly, key developers of CRT named several defining elements of this intellectual movement (Matsuda, Lawrence, Delgado & Crenshaw, 1993). CRT conceptualizes race consciousness and its prevalence in several fields, including education and sport. CRT can deliver new tools for identifying racial and ethnic disparities and can lead to applicable reforms within education within the United States. For CRT advocates, the question is not do we live in a racist society? Rather it is a conclusion: we do live in a racist society and we need to do something about it; therefore, anti-racism should be mainstreamed into the core of education (Gillborn, 2006). The objective of CRT is to highlight the relationship between race and other forms of oppression.

Seven to ten tenets of CRT are widely used in the field of education and sport. For the purposes of this study, however, only two are explored. These tenets of CRT include: (a) counter storytelling and; (b); interest convergence (Hiraldo, 2010; Williams, 2010). The majority of scholars who critically analyze the tenants of CRT suggest that these tenets; (a) situate the experiential knowledge of people of color and their communities as

valid and essential to analyzing racial inequalities, racial inequities and other phenomena; (b) challenge the existence and attainability of neutrality, objectivity, colorblindness, and meritocracy, which are central to a liberal racial ideology of equality and equal opportunity; and (c) center race-consciousness, an intentional consideration of race necessitated by racism. According to CRT, racism is interwoven into the fabric of American life. It is normal and so ingrained in the American consciousness that it is ordinary (Parsons, Rhodes, and Brown, 2011).

### *Counterstorytelling*

An essential tenet of CRT is counter storytelling (Matsuda, 1995). This tenet has been an essential feature of educational research that employed a CRT framework (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004). This tenet is a method of telling the story of those experiences that have not been told as well as a tool for analyzing and challenging the stories of those in power (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). The use of counter-stories in analyzing certain phenomena, provides faculty, staff, and students of color a voice to tell their narratives involving marginalized experiences (Hiraldo, 2010). Also, Delgado (1989) states storytelling has a rich and continuing tradition in the African American community due to their necessary survival and liberation. Simply put, counter storytelling, can be described as personal and composite narratives or stories from people of color.

Parker and Lynn (2002) state educational research that focuses on students of color has traditionally ignored historically marginalized groups by simply not addressing their concerns and; (b) de-emphasized race by arguing that the problems students experience in schools can be understood via class or gender analyses that do not fully take race, culture,

language, and immigrant status into account. Furthermore, questions regarding race have remained unaddressed or become shrouded in a language that fails to address important questions regarding the origins, uses, and abuses of social scientific inquiry and the important representation of people of color in educational enterprises (Parker & Lynn, 2002). Therefore the application of counter storytelling is essential to this study.

According to Delgado and Stefancic (2001), counter storytelling is a method of telling a story that aims to cast doubt on the validity of accepted premises or myths, especially ones held by the majority. Also, Ladson-Billings (1998) state counter storytelling can expose the ideologies of the dominant culture about race, which perpetuates racial stereotypes of marginalized groups. For that reason, counter storytelling can assist in analyzing the climate of a college campus and provide opportunities for further research in the ways which an institution can become inclusive (Hiraldo, 2010). Thus, counter-storytelling is a means of exposing and critiquing normalized dialogues that perpetuate racial stereotypes (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004).

The use of counter-stories allows for the challenging of privileged discourses of the majority, therefore serving as a means for giving voices to marginalized groups. In other words, this tenet helps us understand what life is like for others, and invites, the reader into a new and unfamiliar world (Hiraldo, 2010). Also, Solorzano and Yosso (2002) suggest that counter storytelling can be found in various forms, including personal stories and narratives, other people's stories and narratives, and composite stories and narratives. Furthermore, counter-stories gives individuals the opportunity to critically reflect upon their precarious positions while also allowing them to contradict dominant ideologies,

thus, challenging the privileged discourses that are often found at elite, PWI's (Decuir & Dixson, 2010). Furthermore, Delgado (1989) and Lawson (1995) attest that counter storytelling can (a) build community among those at the margins of society; (b) challenge the perceived wisdom of those at the center of society; (c) open new windows into the reality of marginalized groups by showing new possibilities; (d) teach others that by combining both stories and current realities, one can build a new, richer environment, and; (e) provide a context to understand and transform an established belief system.

#### *Interest Convergence Principle of CRT*

Within the context of this study, the interest convergence principle of CRT is a necessary tenet to explore. Originally conceived by Derrick Bell, the interest convergence principle is a method of explanation within the context of CRT. According to Donnor (2005), the interest convergence principle analytically constructs the motivating factors for laws and social policies established to eradicate racial discrimination. The interest convergence principle also provides remedies for racial injustices based on merit and color blindness (Donnor, 2005). For that matter, the terms merit and color blindness, serve as covert methods to implement laws and policies that influence and sustain the economic and political interests of White America. The premise of the interest convergence principle focuses on marginalized groups and their legal history within the United States.

In essence, the interest convergence principle proposes that racial relief will not occur, unless it furthers the interests of the dominant culture, rather than those who subsequently suffered injustices (Donnor, 2005). For example, consider the benchmark ruling of *Brown vs. Board of Education 1954*. Derrick Bell, the founder of CRT and former



attorney for the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), argues that the Brown case was not intended to create equality for people of color; rather, it was a reoccurring, critical issue that White America could not address. Therefore, under the interest convergent principle, the Supreme Court was more interested in providing immediate credibility to global society, rather implementing moral standards and equality.

Additionally, public schools were purposely selected in the Brown decision, because they represented a far more compelling symbol of the evils of segregation (Bell, 1995b). Ultimately, Bell (1980) contends that the Brown decision was not a commitment to justice; it was nothing more than an unwanted, reoccurring problem for White America. While it is acceptable to advocate racial equality throughout society, evaluations of social, political and economic interactions suggest revealed preferences to the contrary (Muhammad, 2009). As an example, Derrick Bell (1980) states, “Whites simply cannot envision the personal responsibility and the potential sacrifice... that true equality for blacks will require the surrender of racism-granted privileges for whites” (p. 522–523). The interest convergence principle is especially useful in examining issues of university recruitment, admissions, financial aid, and most recently in the area of university athletics (Bell, 1972; Donnor 2005).

While a number of athletic programs at PWI’s exhibit stellar commitment to the athletic success of student athletes, many African American athletes participating in revenue producing sport seemingly fall behind in regards to academics. For these individuals, earning a college degree or developing strong academic and transferrable skills in technology, hard sciences, law, and medicine is doubtful (Byrd et al., 2011;

Donnor, 2005). Therefore, the application of the interest convergence principle is to examine the educational experiences of African American athletes is timely (Donnor, 2005). The interest convergence principle, in regards to this study, is applied as a means to highlight the historical and current educational context of African American student athletes. Moreover, the interest convergence principle is used as a method of deconstructing how African American athletes understand educational experiences. According to Tillman (2002), the interest convergence principle is a culturally sensitive methodology because it pays strict attention to the internal and external processes responsible for the construction and deployment of their interests. Additionally, the interest convergence principle serves as a method to further examine the differences and similarities that exist among African American athletes; thus, providing greater understanding of differing outcomes within this particular group of individuals.

Also, the *Ross vs. Creighton University* 1990 ruling exemplifies the interest convergence principle as it pertains to collegiate athletics. This case speaks to the issue of an “implied duty” (see Donnor, 2005, pg. 56) from institutions of higher learning in regards to student athletes. This case reveals the greater understanding of educational expectations and experiences of African American student athletes. This case also reveals that students, including student athletes, hold educational institutions accountable to provide necessary and quality education for all students.

Furthermore, *Ross vs. Creighton University* is a demonstration of how African American athletes, their physical talent, and academic development may be exploited for the specific interests of competition between athletic programs at educational institutions.

The interest convergence principle allows stakeholders to systematically identify the practices that contribute to the academic shortfalls of African American athletes at PWI's. More importantly, the interest convergence principle highlights the low academic expectations athletic programs require for this group of student athletes. The interest convergence principle of CRT is necessary to this study, for it illustrates how a student athlete participating in revenue producing sports at PWI's can be academically successful despite the low expectations of athletic programs (Donnor, 2005).

### *Statement of the Problem*

Participation in intercollegiate athletics has the potential to be a major advantage for African American student athletes; especially at PWI's due to the array of resources and support provided on these campuses. The culmination of competition, rich academic access, and a wealthy amount of campus support, provides student athletes with endless opportunities both educationally and athletically. As previously stated, however, there is a continuous debate concerning the impact and relationship between that athletic participation, academic success, and African American student athletes. Singer (2008), notes that intercollegiate athletics offer unique educational and career opportunities to athletes; more so with athletes from low socioeconomic status as well as athletes with inadequate academic preparation.

Contrastingly, other researchers have debated that collegiate sport exploits the gift of athletic superiority, and yet overlooks their academic and social growth. Nevertheless, when analyzing the relationship between athletics and academics, the very term "student athlete" implies an individual who is being asked to manage and succeed at the tasks that

make up two different realms of his or her life, athletics and academics (Woodruff & Schallert, 2007). Even if we immediately acknowledge that, in fact, there are several other realms within which a student athlete must also live successfully, the contexts of academic and athletic pursuits often produce various sets of motivations that lead to graduate and professional degrees. Universities across the country are challenged with academic attainment from African American male student athletes, however, it is also noted that nearly 50 percent of all student athletes in will not complete a college degree in six years (Tinto, 2012; U.S. Department of Education, 2011). Therefore, African American student athletes pose a unique challenge between athletic participation and academic achievement. For example, African Americans only account for 6 percent of bachelor's degrees and master's degrees, and 8 percent of doctoral degrees awarded at PWI's (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). Additionally, while many PWI's retain anywhere from 50 percent to 81 percent of African American first-time freshmen student athletes, only 42 percent of African American college students who begin college earn their degree in contrast to 62 percent of White students (Black Student College Rates Remain Low, 2014).

Although it is believed that athletic participation is valued more than academic success, it has been noted that a college education significantly impacts an individual's lifetime earning potential. For instance, one year post college graduation, graduates; (a) earn over \$10,000 a year more than those who have not earned a college degree; (b) can expect to earn about 61 percent over a 40-year period than a high school graduate; and (c) earn \$1 million more lifetime earnings than high school graduates (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). These statistics demonstrate academic achievement has a direct influence on

economic mobility. For African American student athletes, it is imperative to convey this reality in terms of increased human and economic capital. Therefore, additional studies are warranted that focus on this topic.

### *Purpose of the Study*

The purpose of this study is to examine and interpret African American male student athletes at PWI's, and motivational factors that influence their persistence to and to graduate school. This research highlights existing experiences of African American student athletes within the context of sport and education. Furthermore, there is a special need for examination of certain factors that contribute to the persistence of African American student athletes through graduate school.

### *Significance of the Study*

The findings of the study reveal pervasive realities concerning African American student athletes. These insights may prove valuable to players, coaches, teachers, professors at colleges, athletic directors, parents, and others associated with intercollegiate athletics.

### *Research Questions*

The content of the dissertation will address the following research questions:

1. How do African American male student athletes who participated at PWI's describe their athletic and academic experiences?
2. How does participation in collegiate sport influence the academic experiences of African American male student athletes?

3. How do African American male student athletes describe the experiences that influenced them to persist through graduate school?

*Summary*

This chapter was an introduction to this study. Furthermore, this chapter presents the reader with current issues and concerns as they relate to African American male student athletes at PWI's. Additionally, the theoretical framework of CRT will be utilized. This study will also use the CRT tenets counter storytelling and interest convergence. An introduction, the theoretical framework, the statement of the problem, purpose of the study, as well as the research questions were given in this chapter as well.

## CHAPTER II

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### *Introduction*

African American history provides a valuable context in which much, if not the entire history of the United States can be taught and studied (Sammons, 1994). In the realm of athletics, academics, and American history, African Americans offer a critical perspective of reexamining and enlightening the realities of multiple practices, beliefs, and ideologies that surface within American society. In order to better understand the relationship between African Americans, athletics, academics, and motivations to obtain graduate degrees, scholars must privy to the historical constructions of race and how race has affected the lives of people throughout history (Agyemang, DeLorme, & Singer, 2010).

#### *Historical Context of African American Athletes*

Participation of African Americans in sport can be dated back to the 19th century. Shortly after the Civil War, initial participation in sport from African Americans were based in southern plantations and major cities in the eastern region of the United States. It is here, in these regions, where African American athletes distinguished themselves in both amateur and professional levels of sport. Although sport was considered a peaceful outlet for many African Americans, continuous racial tension and color barriers prevented the majority of African Americans from sport participation, especially those sports where close interaction with Whites were necessary. This racial tension, otherwise known as racism, can be described as more than merely an attitude or a set of beliefs; racism

expresses itself in practices, institutions, and structures, and validates, establishes, and sustains a racial order (Agyemang, DeLorme, & Singer, 2010). As a result, Whiteness continues to be positioned at the top of American society (as noted earlier, race was originally created by Whites). Reasons for African American exclusion from sport in White society were plentiful; nevertheless, White culture, the inherent belief in African American inferiority, and unequal rights, were key components of the separation of African Americans in sport in the United States.

By the latter period of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the large majority of African Americans athletes were, for various reasons and under different circumstances, excluded from participating in most highly organized sport and forced to establish their own teams and leagues (Wiggins, 2007). Separate African American sport leagues and organizations empowered many African Americans to positively embody successful organizational skill and entrepreneurship during the unjust time period of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Influential examples of early African American organizations in sport were those established in African American high schools. African American high school leagues were models for many future African American collegiate and professional organizations. In 1906, Edwin Henderson (also partnered with five other African Americans) organized and established the Interscholastic Athletic Association (ISAA) (Wiggins, 2007). The ISAA embraced various sports such as football, basketball, and track and field while including high schools in Washington D.C., Indianapolis, Wilmington, and Baltimore. In 1910, Henderson created the Public School Athletic Association (PSAL), at the request of the African American public school system of Washington D.C. (Henderson & Henderson, 1985;



Wiggins, 1997). The PSAL modeled itself after ISAA, which incorporated various sports; however, it advanced itself by incorporating these sports at all K-12 levels (Wiggins, 2007). The PSAL organized various events such as grammar school basketball tournaments, nightly basketball games, and dance tournaments (Henderson & Henderson, 1985; Wiggins, 2000).

Following the implementation of the ISAA and the PSAL, many high school sporting organizations in African American communities would be established (George, 1992; Harris 2000; Wiggins, 2007). For instance, in 1924, the first statewide athletic association formed in the South, The West Virginia Athletic Union, was established (Harris, 2000). This organization would eventually influence the establishment of multiple African American statewide athletic associations in Virginia, North Carolina, Kansas, Missouri, Indiana, and other states (George, 1992). Southern states such as Mississippi, did not establish an African American league until 1942, while the state of Alabama established its first African American sports league in 1948 (Wiggins, 2007).

While segregated African American K-12 athletic programs began to thrive, Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) began to blossom as well. Originally organized during the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, athletic programs at HBCU's were modeled after those at PWI's; they began as informal, student run activities, and later evolved into highly structured and institutionally controlled events (Wiggins, 2007). Intercollegiate organizational structure at HBCU's officially began in 1912, with the implementation of the Colored (later changed to Central) Intercollegiate Athletics Association (CIAA) (Wiggins, 2007). This organization was formed with three schools;

these schools were the prestigious Hampton Institute, Howard University, and Lincoln (PA). The annual Thanksgiving Day football games between different HBCU's, including the first between Howard and Lincoln (PA), fascinated spectators and fans nationally. These organizations promoted positive interaction between athletic programs, institutional faculty, staff, along with community members (Ashe, 1988; Behee, 1974).

Although athletic programs at HBCU's were similar in infrastructure to those at PWI's, there were considerable differences between the two. Unlike sport programs at PWI's, sport programs at HBCU's lacked proper funding to hire large coaching staffs, purchase up-to-date equipment, or to build new facilities. African American athletes never became known to the larger, White American audience. Although admired names in the homes of many in the African American community, African American athletes at HBCU's were summoned to segregation, which prevented exposure by the White controlled media (Ashe, 1988; Captain, 1991; Chalk, 1976; George, 1992; Liberti, 1999, 2004; Miller, 1995; Rhoden, 2006).

African American sport organizations flourished at the professional levels as well. African American professional sports organizations were first implemented in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. African American professional sport organizations primarily existed in the sports of football, basketball, and baseball. Within these sports, baseball demonstrated the highest and most superior organizational structure, while also being the most popular sport within the African American community (Harris, 2000; Wiggins, 2007). Accordingly, the first African American professional sport league, The National Negro Baseball League (NNL), was established in 1920. Teams in cities such as Detroit, St. Louis, and Chicago

participated in this league. This league, however, collapsed shortly after its inception. Shortly thereafter, in 1931, the Eastern Negro League (ENL) was established. The second NNL was created in 1933, which competed against the Negro American League (NAL), respectively (Harris, 2000). These leagues were the cornerstone of African Americans and baseball over the next two decades, representing, simultaneously, some of the worst features of American racism, and the best creative energy of the African American community (Wiggins, 2007).

### *Integration of African American Athletes at PWI's and College Sports*

Prior to World War II, African Americans scarcely represented student bodies at PWI's, let alone their athletic programs. However, there are notable African American athletes who have paved the way for the success African American athletes have today. It is important to note that prior to the 1970's, those PWI's who were generous enough to allow African Americans a position on their athletic program, only allotted one African American the privilege of representing that program (Harris, 2000). The few African Americans that were awarded the opportunity to participate athletically at PWI's were expected to do more than just participate; rather, they were expected to perform at astronomical levels and lead their teams to victory. In order to justify their presence on White teams and at PWI's, they were expected to provide "super performances" during competition (Edwards, 1973). For example, Willis Ward, an African American track runner, scored 13 of the University of Michigan's 18  $\frac{3}{4}$  points to lead his school to victory at the Butler Relays in 1932 (Ashe, 1988; Baker, 1986; Behee, 1974). Jessie Owens, a gold medalist at the 1936 Olympics in Berlin, Germany, scored 40 of Ohio State's 40  $\frac{1}{5}$  points

in a win over California-Berkeley (Ashe, 1988; Baker, 1986; Behee, 1974; Carrol, 1992; Chalk, 1976; Rampersad, 1997; Smith, 1988; Spivey, 1988; Strode & Young, 1990; Wiggins, 2007). These noteworthy athletes also competed and excelled in multiple sports and organizations. Paul Robeson, who is noted as the first African American to be elected to the Walter Camp All-American football team (twice), was involved in singing, acting, the Civil Rights movement, and was one of three African Americans that attended Somerville High School in New Jersey (Behee, 1974). While in high school, Robeson excelled in football, baseball, basketball, and track and field. After Robeson's years at Somerville High School, he attended Rutgers University where he was a member of the football team and Phi Beta Kappa.

World War II brought about a number of changes in the status of African Americans (Harris, 2000). Ironically, like many White Americans, African Americans risked their lives and fought for the American people to eliminate Nazi racism and promote equality; yet racism was embedded within American society unquestionably. Although the defeat of Nazi Germany brought about a repudiation of discriminatory racial views (see Mosely, 2003), there was undoubtedly racial inequality and tension in America between African Americans and Whites. Although some African Americans were highly visible and successful in numerous sports at PWI's across America, African American predominance in sport could not assure them equitable access and treatment, nor withhold them from reoccurring prejudices that many African Americans experienced during this time period.

After World War II, congress created and passed the G.I. Bill; this provided funding for postsecondary education of returning veterans. Many Americans were granted the opportunity to attend colleges, who otherwise would have lacked the financial support to attend. After the passage of this bill, more than 25 percent of the students registered at colleges and universities in 1945 and 1946 were veterans of World War II (Mosely, 2003). Many of the beneficiaries of the G.I. Bill were indeed, African Americans, creating an influx of African Americans attending colleges and universities (Andrews, 1984; Green, 1982). This provided African Americans a greater opportunity to attend PWI's. With the growing possibility of admittance into PWI's by African Americans, a host of racial problems surfaced. The successes of many African American athletes were often eclipsed by the countless acts of discrimination on and off their respective campuses. Interestingly enough, the combination of athletics and academics became a great opportunity and a highly visible method to demonstrate to the world that Americans took assertions of freedom and equality to heart. There were indeed notable African Americans who established athletic success at PWI's prior to World War II, however, African American dominance in sport at prestigious PWI's came after this time period.

Entering the 1960's, African Americans and their experiences with discrimination became a way of life. However, in athletics, racial discrimination was an avenue to buffer and mask this discrimination for short periods of time. By 1962, the African American presence in collegiate sport grew substantially. Many notable student athletes made their mark in this decade. For instance, Oscar Robertson was the player of the year in college basketball (Harris, 2000). Cazzie Russell followed in 1966, the same year that the All-

American first team was comprised of an all-African American roster. It would remain that way for the rest of the decade (Harris, 2000).

African American athletes continued their prestige in other sports as well. African American presence and recognition on the football field was magnified with Ernie Davis becoming the first African American to win the Heisman Trophy in 1961. Mike Garrett and O.J. Simpson followed, both being student athletes at the University of Southern California (Harris, 2000). Moreover, many conferences began to accept African American student athletes in their athletic programs. The Southeastern Conference (SEC), a conference known for its resentment and prejudice against African Americans, integrated in 1967. Accordingly, although African Americans made their mark in society as athletes at PWI's, once they left the confines of the athletic realm, their treatment, like that of nonathletic African Americans, was at best insensitive and often abominable (Harris, 2000).

Nevertheless, as the 1970's approached, African Americans athletes increased their participation in sports at PWI's. As more African Americans participated in intercollegiate sport, the pressure of many African Americans having to perform at exceedingly higher levels than their White counterparts slowly faded. Accordingly, many African Americans still continued their athletic excellence, being named MVP's, players of the year, and All-Americans; which occurred far more repeatedly than White athletes. Accordingly, African American athletes constituted of more than 33 percent of all male collegiate basketball players during the 1970's (Berghorn, Yetman, & Hanna, 1988). In 1971, when the All-America first team comprised only African Americans, all White All-

American first teams have become more infrequent (Harris, 2000). Similarly, in the sport of track and field, African Americans have dominated events such as the long and triple jump, multiple sprints, relays, and hurdles.

By 1988, more than 50 percent of male basketball players and more than 33% of female basketball players were African American (Harris, 2000). As more of these individuals began to participate in athletics at major PWI's, African Americans began to situate themselves at the top of most statistical categories in revenue producing sports. Basketball, for example, has had more African Americans top statistical categories such as rebounding, scoring, assists, steals, and blocks (Harris, 2000; Wiggins, 2007). The sport of football has had similar results; African Americans have topped the categories of rushing, receiving, tackles, and interceptions (Harris, 2000; Wiggins, 2007).

#### *The Necessity of Critical Race Theory*

In order to properly explain the relationship between African American athletes at PWI's and the challenges they encounter both athletically and academically, CRT is used as a lens in which to view these experiences. The images produced through CRT are highly valued while various perspectives convey a vivid image of the realities within particular culture. Accordingly, this theory is necessary to understand African American athletes and their dual pursuit of athletic and academic success within a challenging, environment (Njororai, 2012).

CRT is a theoretical position that challenges mainstream notions of race, racism, and racial power in American society (Donnor, 2005). The premise for CRT is that an examination of race and racism must begin with an understanding that Whiteness has

sustained optimal status not only in American society, but also on the global level (Njororai, 2012). CRT suggests that racial discrimination does not occur unsystematically; instead, modern, racial inequality is methodical and logical on behalf of White America; it privileges and normalizes cultural messages, institutional policies, and practices that function to benefit Whites both directly and indirectly (Donnor, 2005). The framework of CRT is a set of basic insights, perspectives, and methods that could help scholars identify, analyze, and change those structural and cultural aspects of society that maintain subordinate and dominant positions in and out of organizations (Njororai, 2012).

Within the context of American history, people of color are characterized and marginalized based on skin color. The outcome of judgments, stereotypes, and racial ideologies shape many realities of social organizations and cultural practices. Therefore, given the foundations of CRT, it is safe to note that the experiences of African American college athletes reflect the current place of the African American population in America (Njororai, 2012). Njororai (2012) also notes:

“When examining the experiences of African American student athletes, especially at PWI’s, there is a need to connect the social, cultural, individual, and institutional factors that make it difficult for many African American student athletes to develop skills, aside from those acquired in sport, to succeed in college and in life (p.41).” Foster (2005) notes that institutional racism is deeply ingrained in the attitudes and actions that contribute to the many challenges that arise when comparing African American student athletes from the general student body at PWI’s.



### *African American Athletes at PWI's*

The unique role of African American athletes in America continues to generate considerable discussion amongst scholars and researchers. Central to this discussion, is the dominant presence of African American athletes in athletics at PWI's, as well as their athletic and academic experiences at PWI's. Currently, major PWI's endorse the commercialization of sport programs to generate revenue, increase visibility, recruit students, and receive alumni support (Beamon, 2008; Donnor, 2005; Upthegrove, Roscigno, & Charles, 1999). However, while many PWI's support and endorse African American athletes, African American student athletes often encounter challenges that make it difficult for them to excel in their dual pursuit of success in athletics and academics (Walton & Butryn, 2006).

Despite the relatively small representation of African American student athletes at PWI's, socially, they occupy a substantial and prominent space in society either in controversy or in merriment (Comeaux and Harrison, 2011). African American student athletes have distinct variations apart from White student athletes as well as the general student population. Although every student on the campus of a PWI has a host of problems and issues that surface daily, African American student athletes have added demands imposed by athletic demands, which in turn creates a considerable rise in challenges faced by this population (Howard-Hamilton & Watt, 2001; Jolly, 2008; Watt & Moore, 2001). To magnify this statement, student athletes devote much of their time to practices, travel, team meetings and of course, weekly game day preparation (Comeaux and Harrison, 2011). Moreover, it is not unusual for a student athlete to dedicate him/herself to more

than 40 hours per week towards athletics (Eitzen, 2009). Additionally, mental fatigue, physical exhaustion, and lingering injuries, continuously afflict those who participate in collegiate sports (Comeaux & Harrison, 2011; Eitzen, 2009; Wolverton, 2008).

Additionally, whether by choice, PWI campus life, or comprehensively influenced by athletic culture, African American student athletes seemingly live, eat, study, and socialize together; which leads in part, to social isolation from the general student body population (Jayakumar & Comeaux, 2011; Shulman & Bowen, 2001). Comeaux (2007) notes that, in addition to African American student athletes being socially separated from the general student population, many departments on campus have produced narrowly tailored services and programs that do not support, affirm, or reaffirm cultural differences and thereby limit the full potential growth of certain students. Additionally, Hood (2004) and Rueda (2004) note that more contemporary conceptions of culture are often linked to racial and ethnic identity, which leads to specific judgments from dominant cultures, which are then acted upon towards minority cultures (i.e. African American student athletes); as a result, the continuous separation between the general student body at PWI's and African American student athletes grows and spreads more rapidly.

#### *African American Athletes at PWI's and Academics*

Openly, many prestigious PWI's benefit from college athletics, however many African American student athletes continue to show less forms of academic success (Eitzen, 2009). Yet the reasons this population of students continue to struggle academically are not fully understood, let alone taken seriously. Society gets the impression that PWI's as a whole, are thriving and focusing on the success of African

American athletes' physical capability, rather than their academic well-being and success.

For instance, Wiggins (1989) notes:

“African Americans are thought to possess natural athletic ability in speed, quickness, and jumping ability... they excel in sport... that has little to do with their work ethic or their intellect... in fact, it reinforces the belief in their indolence and incognizance (pg.158-185).”

The previous statement demonstrates that although athletes are believed to excel both in academics and athletics respectively, there seems to be a continuous lack of emphasis garnered for academic success. Today, universities use the commercialization of sport to generate revenue, increase visibility, recruit students, and receive alumni support, which in turn creates pressure to win (Beamon, 2008; Donnor, 2005). However, in comparison to the efforts and pressure to win consistently, there seems to be an unequal emphasis placed on academic superiority and achievement. To further this statement, a study conducted by Salmone (2005) concluded that if 100% of African American student athletes earned undergraduate degrees, the economic value of those degrees would only be worth 5 % of the total value of their athletic contribution to their respective PWI. Therefore, the clear emphasis of athletics at institutions of “higher learning,” causes a number of African American athletes to sacrifice their academic goals.

Additionally, the literature supports the notion that African American athletes tend to receive greater positive reinforcement for their athletic performances rather than their academic accomplishments. For instance, research conducted by Adler and Adler (1985) and Adler and Adler (1991) demonstrates how academic goals of athletes came secondary

to African American student athletes. This research found that most African American student athletes, upon arrival at PWI campuses, felt idealistic about aspiring majors; however this same idealism last for a short period of time (until the end of the first year), noting that it was difficult to maintain a successful balance between both athletics and academics. To further this research, these African American student athletes stated that athletic personnel such as coaches, demanded much of their and commitment towards athletics (Adler, 1985; Adler, 1991; Eitzen, 2000). Thus, while time and commitment shifts away from academics and more towards athletics, or, is unequally managed, many African American student athletes tend to enter college as marginal students and leave the same way (Eitzen, 2000). Years later, Lewis (2009) extends this statement, declaring that African American student athletes are virtually at or near the bottom of every statistical measure that focuses on academic achievement. Many African American athletes for that matter are categorized and placed in a mounting system of under achievement.

Furthermore, African American athletes are given the connotation that they are enrolled at PWI's in order to perform in their respective sport, not to attain academic prestige. Significant numbers of African American athletes have not internalized academic values, therefore making academics secondary, when compared to athletics. Emphasis is therefore aimed at athletic success. Academic success deteriorates and as a result, graduation becomes distant, especially during their eligibility. For instance, the NCAA uses a six year scale to measure the academic outcomes of student athletes, considering that five years is the maximum length of time a student athlete can receive financial assistance (Donnor, 2005). The failure to graduate (during eligibility) by numerous

African American athletes is a form of exploitation; this exploitation occurs when these student athletes are denied an education (Sailes, 1986; Simiyu, 2012). Thus failing to graduate, and lacking any marketable skills beyond athletic talent is a reality that many African American athletes tend to face after expired eligibility.

Accordingly, the literature in athletics criticizes the African American athlete. This criticism is based on character flaws, personal reasoning, or poor judgment. More importantly, this discourse centers the literature on the culpability of student educational failure. On the other hand, academic literature that places blame on students for academic failure often has the intention to deflect attention away from social failures and institutional injustices. Contrastingly, emphasis on declining academic achievement rates need not be placed on the student athlete solely; responsibility should more so be placed on members of educational institutions. As stated previously, throughout history, little has been expected intellectually of African American athletes once they are admitted into institutions of higher learning. With a lack of expectations towards these student athletes, comes a sense of disengagement from educators and the institution as a whole. For these student athletes, this disengagement is a result of a combination of their marginalized status in society and institutional neglect from colleges and universities.

When institutions are unresponsive to students, especially areas African American student athletes, the risk of academic underachievement is substantially increased, which in turn, is a major explanation for the declining academic achievement rates throughout the literature. While athletic expectations are kept high, academic expectations are kept low, which in turn damages African American student athletes from urban communities.

In this instance, institutions must take responsibility rather than place sole blame on student athletes for their academic outcomes. An example of how institutions can proactively take responsibility to properly educate African American student athletes can be to take culturally relevant action. Ladson-Billings (1995) states that this form of action is imperative and can benefit all students. Leaders, faculty, staff, and all campus officials must, more, authentically, create responsive strategies that are effective with student athletes across multiple lines of differences (Comeaux & Harrison, 2011). New and creative approaches, such as critical thinking and learning, can facilitate students' critical academic and psychological development, while simultaneously connecting them to relevant issues in different social contexts (Comeaux & Harrison, 2011; Duncan-Andrade, 2010; Mahiri, 1998; Morrell & Duncan-Andrade, 2002).

Another example of how culturally relevant action can be utilized, is incorporated in the Scholar-Baller program initiated by C. Keith Harrison. This program introduced this paradigm into athletic departments due to the scrutiny of the lack of responsive intervention strategies to improve student athlete academic success and integration in the social setting (Harrison, 1995, 2002). This program considers the experiences, values, and cultural orientations of student athletes in order to foster more positive learning experiences, environments, and desirable outcomes (Comeaux & Harrison, 2011). With this, self-exploration surfaces, to a certain extent through popular culture, media, interests, and language. As a result of these inclusionary practices, more favorable outcomes of student athlete academic achievement and student athlete retention have been and will be noticed (Steinbach, 2004).

### *Connecting Diversity, Athletics, and Academics*

60 years have passed since the Supreme Court Ruling of *Brown v. Board of Education 1954*. Currently, we are at a critical point in terms of our progress in addressing the issues of race, opportunity, ethnicity, and diversity in our society (Polite, 2007). Edwards (1985) accurately notes that the problems discussed two decades earlier are now unmistakably recognizable to the masses. During that span of time, we have moved from the discussion of is there a problem, towards a discussion of how to solve this problem.

Many people globally believe that the United States is the definitive destination for prosperity and opportunity. These opportunities may come in a variety of ways including real estate, finance, and undoubtedly sports. However, as the thought of the American dream continues to grow, the apparent and unequal representation, opportunity, and injustice for African Americans remains to be an uphill battle. As African Americans struggle to strive, many individuals within the dominant culture continue to impede the progress of these people from sheer ignorance, prejudice, and discrimination (Guttman, 1993; Weatherspoon, 1988).

As the need for change grows, there is an increasing need to incorporate diversity in the general workforce, (Wright, Ferris, & Hiller, 1995). Diversity is a term that has evolved from the everlasting movement of the Civil Rights era. When looking at diversity, there are several perspectives that shape the definition. Joplin and Daus (1997) define diversity as any characteristic used to differentiate one person from another. Accordingly, many PWI's have adopted the philosophy, or better yet, the practice, of working, socializing, and associating with persons with whom they could most easily assimilate

(Polite, 2007). As a result, these same campuses did not, and have not accounted for those specific populations that do not resemble, communicate, nor conform to this dominant culture. Topics of diversity, athletics, and academics are important to discuss due to the plight of African American athletes.

Many of the challenges that African American athletes endure, can be seen at many educational institutions; both at PWI's and K-12 education. Although many individuals perceive athletics and academics as arenas that unite and bring individuals together for a common goal, the lasting effects of racial discrimination throughout American society has created and sustained separation between people of color and the dominant culture. Thus, the subject of diversity in athletics and academics is a noteworthy topic. Polite (2007) states:

“The lack of diversity in key decision making positions in sport has heightened the need for open discussion, dialogue, and research in society's efforts to solve and provide valid answers, prescriptions, or solutions to the issue of race and opportunities for underrepresented groups. The same holds true to that of education. In education, the relationship between learning and diversity is a growing concern.”

Oglesby and Schrader (2007) note that over the past two decades, a move towards people of color, more specifically African Americans, and Whites working together promises a brighter future for American society. However, this move towards a brighter future is moving exceedingly slow (Oglesby & Schrader, 2007). National organizations that hold institutions accountable for preparing quality educators are being scrutinized, because they



promote, as a primary goal, the assurance of equality in higher education is not tangibly displayed on a regular basis. Beliefs, practices, and policies that directly or indirectly maintain racial implications have been eradicated slowly, unevenly, and only minimally (Carter, 2003).

While this movement is developing at a relatively slow pace, it is necessary to point out that the majority of individuals placed in authoritative roles as well as those with power, are usually White. Simultaneously, a major goal of both athletics and academics should be to promote the basic concepts of equality for all human beings. Equal access, opportunity, and justice for African Americans in the United States will continue to generate enormous amounts of discussion, especially due to the growing globalization and attention paid to athletics. A commitment to the values and true principles of equal access and opportunity best exemplified by actions rather than by words (Polite, 2007).

With a majority of White individuals in authoritative positions, there is a deep misunderstanding of power and institutionalized privilege vested in dominant groups. For instance, currently, White individuals represent 79.5 percent of athletic directors at Division I universities (Lapchik, Donovan, & Pierson, 2014). Contrastingly, out of 120 Division I institutions, only 16.4 percent of athletic directors are African Americans which is a decrease of 1.2 percent since 2011 (Lapchik, Donovan, & Pierson, 2014). The chronological, historical, and seemingly unchanging hiring practices of PWI's and the impact of the current status of many African Americans are two areas that require necessary and vital restructuring. However, due to the lack of an African American presence in these positions, the dominant culture forgoes any awareness of discrimination

and malpractice on their behalf. In other words, once this awareness is relinquished, cultural and institutional discrimination occurs.

Cultural and Institutional discrimination can be defined as practices exercised through power against racial groups with the intentional or unintentional support of the dominant culture (Jones, 1972). The Constitution, Bill of Rights, and The Declaration of Independence, all seminal works in the foundation of the United States, claim to embrace the basic notions of equality, liberty, and justice for all. However, many people (i.e. African Americans) continuously struggle to reap the benefits of equal opportunity. This is even more evident when matters of decision making practices and actions such as allocating resources, making personnel decisions, and prioritizing rewards and recognition within organizations are needed.

If institutions are to close the gap between African Americans and Whites, then it is important that White individuals and stakeholders in the field of athletics and academics recognize their difference in privilege. Oglesby and Schrader (2007) state “White individuals should take a personal, more accountable approach to bridge the gap between Whites and African American individuals.” This approach can benefit all individuals, for they can utilize new skills and strategies of inclusivity for people of color. Once these skills and strategies are learned, they then become invested in implementing and disseminating learned information. This type of critical and personal approach allows stakeholders to step back from thinking about athletics and academics as merely a place of personal achievement, but rather to view these institutions as cultural institutions embedded in political, economic, and ideological formations (Sage, 1998).

### *African American Student Athletes and Diversity*

As our nation continues to grow with diverse populations, it is essential that both athletics and academics be at the forefront of disseminating research to enlighten realities of society and provide progressive leadership in our ever changing, more diverse nation. Moreover, the importance of cultural diversity in athletic programs is identical to that of academics. Diversity first and foremost, reflects the unique set of values, beliefs, attitudes, and expectations, as well as language, symbols, customs, and behaviors that individuals possess by virtue of sharing some common characteristic with others (Adler, 1991; DeSensi, 1994, Polite, 2007). Accordingly, the concept of incorporating cultural diversity into both athletics and academics must become a priority for stakeholders (i.e., teachers, coaches, administrators, and faculty) to effectively prepare students to meet the challenges of America's diverse population.

Much of the literature in regards to African American student athletes state that, these student athletes come from urban areas of the country. Urban areas consist of areas that have more than 1,000 people per square mile (U.S. Census, 2010). Adding to this fact, American society has reproduced the belief that urban areas consist of populations that are disadvantaged (poor, unequal access to educational and sports facilities, low socioeconomic status) and primarily Black and/or African American. These minorities are typically believed to be African Americans. More importantly, the continuous use of the word "urban" throughout African American athlete literature details that popular American society perceives many African American student athletes to be from areas that are consistent with this notion. Given the context of the word "urban," it has become a

signifier for poverty, nonwhite violence, narcotics, bad neighborhoods, an absence of family values, and without a doubt, failing schools (Steinberg & Kincheloe, 2007).

In the field of academia, understanding diversity can promote valuable insight on how to develop solutions for many issues related to African American athletes. Urban, public schools are populated with overwhelming numbers of students of color, more specifically, African Americans. Today's public school system is situated within the global political economy, which causes a host of pressures on the educational system (Lipman, 2002). As a result, urban and public schools are now re-segregated and notoriously underfunded and undereducated in comparison with their more affluent suburban counterparts (Steinberg & Kincheloe, 2007). The situation of urban schools in American society is similar to the historical circumstances of African Americans in the United States. As African Americans fall behind in America's education system, the workforce continues to move down the same path of inequality. Thus, America has produced a highly segmented and increasingly divided labor force (Lipman, 2002).

Additionally, methods of incorporating diverse lifestyles in athletics are represented in the literature. These examples are very comparable to those of academia. Singer (2010), notes that factors such as organizational culture and organizational institutions help to shape the choices and behaviors of various stakeholders in a group. Therefore, managing diversity is a function of the culture of that institution. These institutions in higher education, should embrace a culture that values diversity because of its social responsibility to society and its institutional performance (Singer 2010). Social responsibility is characterized by an underlying respect for differences amongst

individuals; therefore, an institutions social responsibility is to treat all members of society fairly.

The concept of a more integrated and interdependent global society should be inherited along with the framework of our current athletic and academic agendas. The infusion of diversity, culture, and race should be a priority in preparing our African American student athletes to meet the challenges of our future.

### *Code Switching*

A much better understanding of the ability of some students of color at PWI's to effectively adapt to the academic demands of their campus climates is essential to the success of policies designed to enhance learning for the increasingly diverse student populations within college and university communities (Haralson, 1996). Code switching has been espoused as the goal for African Americans, however, it has not been universally accepted and has been subject to objections (Koch, Gross, & Kolts, 2001). Code switching has typically been defined as the use of two or more linguistic varieties in the same conversation or interaction (Scotton & Ury, 1977). Co-cultural theory examines how African American men choose to enact certain communication strategies within the dominant cultural space of a PWI (Glenn & Johnson, 2012).

According to Haralson (1996), cultural interaction styles of many students of color are perceived as potentially threatening, eliciting fear reactions in the White community. For that reason, one would expect that persons from cultural backgrounds and/or communities with low rates of higher educational participation may face particularly severe handicaps in attempting to complete higher educational degree programs

(Haralson, 1996). In trying to do so, these individuals may frequently be forced to, at least partially, reject membership in communities that have been part of their upbringing (Tinto, 1987). According to Labov (1970), it is believed that the goal of most African Americans to acquire full control of the standard language without giving up their own culture. In addition, it has been noted that most people, regardless of race, alter their linguistic style according to the situation in they are interacting (Ball, Giles, & Hewstone, 1985; Street & Giles, 1982).

Orbe (1994) also note that Black men often learn how to interact with other cultures through interaction with others, observation, and trial and error. Also, the importance of learning “how to play the part” when interacting with both African Americans and dominant cultures to garner acceptance without showing too much social distance from African Americans to avoid being a “sell out.” Cuyjet (2006) discussed the notion of “cool pose” or “masking” where Black men suppress the negative effects of difficult social environments and adopt speech patterns, physical appearance, and material possessions of their peers deemed “cool.” According to Loo and Rolison, (1986), persistence for successful students of color appears to depend primarily on the ability to adjust their cultural interaction styles in order to accommodate their interactions with other cultures. (Orbe, 1998) also notes that within various social spaces, co-cultural groups enact a variety of strategies to achieve preferred outcomes when interacting with dominant social groups.

As a result, a major barrier to retention from students of color, is the perception by these individuals that they are outsiders in the academic word, which creates a hostile

environment (Gibbs, 1988). Furthermore, this may also impact perceptions of Black men in university environments (Cuyjet, 2006). African American men select communication strategies as they decide how to present their social identities with members of dominant cultural groups (Glenn & Johnson, 2012). Orbe (1998, 2004) states that cultural groups who coexist within social spaces and negotiate their cultural identities within the power structures of dominant cultural groups. Although most studies do not specifically address communication strategies Black male students use to negotiate these environments, Haralson (1996) suggested that they may alter their level of assertiveness at PWI's.

#### *Parental Involvement*

There are many advantages associated with parental involvement in education (Wallace, 2013). Research has shown that parent involvement has a significant influence on student achievement (Barnard, 2004; Fan & Chen, 2001). In an attempt to offer some clarity to the term, Clark (1983) contended that parent involvement was comprised of “distinctive parent-child interactions,” namely helping students with homework, expressing their expectations of school performance and creating emotionally supportive learning environments at home.

Becher's (1986) literature review on parent involvement found that there was “substantial evidence” which shows that students whose parents are involved in their children's schooling have increased academic performance and overall cognitive development. Students with actively involved parents are, by and large, more engaged in the classroom (Mo & Singh, 2008), more positive about school and learning (Shumow & Miller, 2001), more likely to enroll in advanced courses (Henderson & Mapp, 2002), and

less likely to drop out (Rumberger, 1995). Because it holds so much promise, parent involvement has been identified as a priority in the United States educational system (Elementary and Secondary Education Act, 2001).

However, existing literature often suggests that there is a lack of ethnic minority parent involvement in schools broadly (Griffith, 1996; Ho, 2002) and a lack of African American parent involvement in particular (Hayes, 2011). Although research suggests that many ethnic minority parents are not routinely involved in their children's schooling, it would be both unsound and unfair to conclude that they do not value education (as some teachers are prone to conclude (Wallace, 2013). Importantly, parents can be involved in a number of ways and to varying degrees (Wallace, 2013). Some parents are very much committed to their children's education but are not restricted by language and cultural barriers (Denessen, Bakker, & Gierveld, 2007; Pena, 2000), work schedules, child care (or lack thereof), and limited transportation (Harris & Goodall, 2008); Reglin, King, Losike-Sedime, & Kettere, 2003). Some parents, for example, assume a home-based role that includes helping with homework and reinforcing suitable school behaviors (Wallace, 2013). Other parents may take on a school-based approach, such as attending school meetings and events, or communicating regularly with their children's teachers.

There is a voluminous body of literature that concerns itself with parent involvement and the manner in which parents act as agents and advocates on behalf of their children in schools (Barnard, 2004; Fan & Chen, 2001; McNeal, 1999; McWayne et al., 2004; Miedel & Reynolds, 1999). The existing literature helps to inform this work, because it offers critical insights into the manner in which parents and schools have



attempted to develop a symbiotic relationship that seeks to offer the best equation possible to school age children (Howard & Reynolds, 2008). Researchers have also found that parent involvement is associated with a greater likelihood of aspiring to attend college and actually enrolling (Cabrera & Steven, 2000; Horn, 1998) as well as higher grades (Muller & Kerbow, 1993). While there are a number of studies concerning the benefits of parent involvement in the professional literature, most of the general parent involvement literature fails to problematize the roles of race and class in parenting practices with schools. Nevertheless, research suggests that the more engaged parents are in their children's education, the more likely their children are to succeed in school (Eccles & Harold, 1993; Harris & Goodall, 2008).

### *Community Involvement*

Communities play a vital role in the lives of African American students. In recent years, the importance of school community relations and overall school public relations has grown rapidly. The heavy impact of school failure has provoked community involvement in part from evidence that African American students who succeed against the odds do so with the support of adults and important institutions in their communities (Nettles, 1991). Communities can be parts of solutions that seek to provide for students social services, caring adults, and enhanced opportunities for intellectual and psychosocial growth (Nettles, 1991). The development of sound and constructive relationships between the school and the community are a necessary and natural function of a publicly supported institution in a democratic society (Green-Powell, Hilton, & Joseph, 2011).

Communication is a key element to building effective relationships with external stakeholders (Green-Powell, Hilton, & Joseph, 2011). This seamless approach combines “inside” expertise with “outside” resources and support, resulting in a dual benefit: expanding services, support and opportunities for young people, while strengthening the school as a universally available public institution for all residents (Green-Powell, Hilton, & Joseph, 2011). Furthermore, schools that communicate with their external publics in an organized way have a better chance of receiving public support, minimizing criticism, learning the values and priorities of a community and reducing many functional ideas that will help them educate students better (Green-Powell, Hilton, & Joseph, 2011). However, communities are also characterized by the structures, rules, norms, and processes that serve to maintain the community and support its constituent individuals and organizations (Nettles, 1991).

#### *Graduate School for African Americans at PWI's*

Relatively few studies have been completed that focus specifically on the experiences of African American graduate students. Nonetheless, the need to study African American graduate students during a time when disproportionately low numbers of these individuals obtain graduate degrees deserves a considerable amount of attention. Historically, American society has viewed securing a graduate degree as a major link to social class status and attainment of wealth (Person and LeNoir, 1997). Education has made a difference in the United States, however, for various reasons, graduate and professional degrees have been continuously overlooked. The truth of the matter is, if and once undergraduate degrees are completed, many African Americans do not persist to

obtain graduate degrees. Furthermore, given the disproportional numbers of African American students at PWI's as related to Whites, future studies warrant the examination of possible avenues that will increase persistence towards graduate degrees from African Americans, more specifically, African American student athletes.

The issue of race and academics that propelled quantities of the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950's and 1960's continues to be discussed, even though opportunities and admittance into PWI's has substantially increased. The number of African American graduate students prior to the 1970's was not high, and with the combination of race and discrimination, the experiences of this population did not make many research agendas. In 1972, however, Willie & McCord (1972) provoked thought and research towards the topic of African American graduate students and their experiences. During the 1980's, Fleming (1984) introduces many questions about the experiences of African American students at PWI's and graduate school, while other scholars raised inquiry on the relationship of race and education. In addition, studies such as (Thomas, 1981), Allen (1988), Blackwell (1983) have explored a more in depth approach to the impact race might have on African Americans entering graduate school.

The 1990's saw an increase of studies that investigated the experiences of graduate students (Ellis, 2001). Nettles (1990), Turner and Thompson (1993), and Tinto (1993) are all seminal pieces of work in regards to the study of African Americans and their socialization experiences at PWI's. "This time period witnessed an emergence of studies that investigated graduate students and socialization (Ellis, 2001, pg. 31)." Even as the body of literature continues to grow, however, African American graduate students and

their motivational factors of pursuing graduate degrees have been minimally explored. As our future continues, educators still rely on the beginning works in the 1970's, which remains as a foundation for the work of many scholars who choose to investigate the sensitive issues of race and graduate students.

Current demographic projections indicate that people of color will represent more than 50% of the American population within the next few decades (Milner, 2004). Yet, the fact remains that there is a paucity of African Americans who are earning graduate degrees in relation to White graduate degree recipients (Thompson, 1999). Currently, there are more White graduate students enrolled in graduate programs than African Americans in the United States. According to The U.S. Census Bureau (2013) while African Americans represent 13.2 percent of the American population, they only account for 8 percent of awarded master's degrees, and only 6 percent of doctoral degrees earned. Of these percentages, there is little research in comparison to Whites, about their experiences in graduate school. Studies, however, should focus on the experiences of this 6 percent and 8 percent of African Americans that obtain graduate degrees in order to increase the numbers of African American graduate students in the United States.

There have been studies that have shown both positive and negative experiences of African Americans and graduate school. For instance, Milner (2004) states that many African American graduate students feel as if they are not valued or they lack respect, especially at PWI's. This could be because the perspectives of African American students differ from those of dominant culture. Clearly, African Americans bring a wealth of knowledge and nonetheless money, to PWI campuses, yet their knowledge can be

circumvented by the negative actions, suggesting disvalue and respect (Milner, 2004). When this sense of value and respect is revoked, African American graduate students tend to withhold their knowledge and perspectives because of their frustration, which is detrimental to their persistence and success (Delpit, 1995; Milner, 2004). Needless to say, African American graduate students, like all students, need to feel wanted in order to thrive and succeed in these solitary environments.

Additionally, added stress or anxiety is associated with the feeling of being intellectually inferior. With the feeling of being intellectually inferior, African American students often find themselves working overtime to demystify or challenge negatively held stereotypes about other African Americans (Aronson & Salinas, 1998; Aronson et al., 1999; Steele & Aronson, 1995). Furthermore, along with the feeling of disvalue, disrespect, and the intellectually inferior stereotype, African American graduate students may also become exasperated due to the expectancy from the dominant culture that they are the exclusive representatives for their race. This adds extreme pressure or discouragement because they simply cannot be the authority for all African American issues. Thus becoming the spokesperson for an entire race could become a burden, especially when the statements of these individuals can be taken out of context (Ford, Milner & Sims, 2004).

In spite of these difficulties and unreceptive environments at PWI's, many African American graduate students indeed persist and graduate. There have been successful strategies that have aided African Americans in persistence through graduate school. One of the main strategies that educators in higher education must consciously and assertively

pursue through their work is making the implicit rules and norms of PWI's explicit to African American graduate students (Milner, 2004). To further this statement Delpit (1995) states that if you do not have the privilege of being a member of a dominant culture, being told explicitly the rules of that culture makes acquiring power easier. Accordingly, explicitly providing African American graduate students with a number of the ingredients that ensure success could be central to their persistence. Accordingly, university officials should exercise their knowledge and power to best make rules explicit to all students in a rational and genuine manner. Through this, these individuals can thoroughly deliberate and analyze thinking that may promote a more clear view of the expectations of what is needed to succeed in PWI's.

Another success strategy that is essential to the success of African American graduate students is the presence of a role model or a mentor. Mentoring has been found to be significant in the persistence of African American graduate students (Milner, Husband, & Jackson, 2002; Smith and Davidson, 1992; Patterson-Stewart, Ritchie, and Sanders, 1997). Tillman (2001) also supports the notion that mentoring pairs should be developed by and for both African American students as well as graduate students. Another component to mentoring is the necessity of creating career functions that are specific to the needs to the protégé and the mentor (Tillman, 2001). This strategy is related to the necessity of making the explicit rules and norms implicit. Additionally, there should be some form of evaluation built into the mentoring process (Milner, 2004). This is necessary in order to monitor the progress of the graduate student at every stage of their career as well as understand their strengths and weaknesses (Tillman, 2001).

The experiences of African American graduate students have the potential to be so damaging that it accelerates their premature withdrawal from PWI's (Milner, 2004). This section has highlighted some of those negative experiences encountered from African American graduate students as well as possible solutions to evade these negative experiences. Relatively speaking, campus officials hold the responsibility to provide supportive initiatives to help students of color, underserved students, as well as all students the opportunity to navigate the difficult challenges they encounter. There are indeed systematic practices that directly influence the experiences of African American graduate students. These practices are deeply imbedded and are far beyond the control of campus officials; however, they can contribute to the enhancement of African American graduate student experiences.

### *Motivation*

Questions of motivation are at the forefront of concerns for African Americans in general, more specifically, African American athletes. African American student athletes exhibit high motivation in their respective sports. Concurrently, these same student athletes are indeed expected to display and transfer this same motivation in academics as well (Simons, Van Rheenen, & Covington, 1999). Successful African American athletes demonstrate hard work, self-discipline, perseverance, determination, persistence, and they are able to stay focused (Covington, 2000). These skills, when transferred academically, have the potential to be of great benefit for these individuals in their lives after athletics.

Much of the literature in regards to African American student athletes and motivation focuses on their perceived deficits such as a lack of willingness to participate

in academics, intellectual inferiority, or the lack of interest (Simons, Van Rheenen, & Covington, 1999; Snyder, 1996; Snyder & Spreitzer, 1992). This is, in part, because the study of motivation appears to be a key variable in understanding achievement strivings of African Americans (Graham, 1994). Organizing literature poses a particular challenge, relatively due to stigma and status of the field (i.e. African American student athletes) in general and partially due to the topics motivation researchers have chosen to pursue. In other words, the willingness on behalf of scholars to critically observe, focus, and disseminate information on the positive motivation factors as it represents this population, is indeed minimal. For instance, as is written throughout much of the literature, far too many African Americans lag behind academically, not due to intellectual incompetence or specific learning skills, but rather the low expectations that are placed on them by society or themselves, deny the importance of individual effort, or do not persist in the eye of failure (Graham, 1994). With these statements comes belief, and ultimately the focus on positive motivation deteriorates over time. Therefore the need to address the positive motivations of African American student athletes is timely.

Motivation is jointly determined by the perceived likelihood of attaining a goal and the value associated with attaining that goal (Atkinson, 1964; Rotter, 1966). Covington (1992) and Covington and Berry (1976) state that motivation can then be properly explained to enlighten the masses on the positive motivation these individuals tend to exhibit. According to Atkinson (1964) and Weiner (1974), both seminal pieces of work in regards to student athletes and motivation, postulated that the motivation to achieve is a learned drive that is the result two forces; the need to approach success and



the need to avoid failure. These motivations are fueled by hope, confidence, pride, and expectation for those who desire to approach success, while the feelings of indignity, embarrassment, and shame surface for those attempting to avoid failure. Furthermore, individuals who are highly motivated attribute success to ability, effort, hard work, and dedication, while failure is attributed to low levels of effort. The term motivation has several definitions; it can be defined as (a) the force that accounts for the arousal, selection, continuation of behavior, and the desire and willingness to do something (Singh, Singh, & Singh, 2012); and (b) the forces either within or external to a person that arouse enthusiasm and persistence to pursue a certain course of action (Daft, 1977; Singh, Singh, & Singh, 2012). Simply put however, motivation can best be described as the dynamics that “gets us going and helps us get the job done (Pintrich & Schunk, 1996; Woodruff and Schallert, 2008). Motivation is an internal process that initiates, guides, and maintains behavior over time therefore, it can determine the amount of effort and persistence they dedicate to a specific activity or lifestyle such as athletics and academics (Huss- Keeler, Peters, & Moss, 2013; Stipek, 2002).

Intrinsic motivational factors are a reoccurring topic of discussion throughout literature and research in regards to motivation and African American student athletes. The source of motivation can be intrinsic which simply means that it is a willingness from within the specific individual. Ryan and Deci (2000) refer to intrinsic motivation as “someone engaging in an activity for the inherent satisfactions rather than for some separable consequence. (pg.56)” Also, intrinsic motivation is demonstrated through motivation to know, motivation toward accomplishment, and motivation to explore, and

motivation to experience stimulation (Vallerand et al., 1992). Intrinsic motivation reveals perceived competence; which is considered to be the beliefs held by individuals that reflect their understanding of their own and perceived abilities (Bandura, 1977; Deci & Ryan, 1985; Harter, 1982). Accordingly, African American students who enroll in graduate programs, intrinsically feel more competent in areas of academe, leisure, and interpersonal endeavors (Uqdah, Tyler, & DeLoach, 2009).

On the other hand, motivation can be classified as extrinsic; meaning that the specific motivation comes from an external source or factor. Further explained, intrinsic motivation can be derived out of genuine interest in an activity while extrinsic motivation is derived out of an expected gain or an inseparable outcome (Kuskar, Croiset, & Ten Cate, 2013). Furthermore, Deci et al.'s (1991) study, provided the allusion that both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation was closely connected to the complete core of student athletes (Woodruff and Schallert, 2008). With student athletes in particular, and the expectations of the athletic lifestyle, these individuals come to value the behavior and has identified with and accepted the regulatory process (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Simply put, student athletes are more motivated to act in a way in which he or she can identify (extrinsic), and the given task is seen as an expression of the self and no separation exists between the tasks itself (intrinsic). Student athletes have personal goals and work towards obtaining these goals (Stipek, 2002), therefore the behavior in which a student athlete demonstrates, is influenced by certain factors (Huss- Keeler, Peters, & Moss, 2013). Deci et al. (1991) and Ryan and Deci (2000) note that student athletes are inherently motivated

to internalize and integrate within themselves the regulation of activities that are useful for effective functioning.

Disproving racial and intellectual stereotypes, another form of extrinsic motivation, has surfaced throughout the literature and research for African American student athletes as well. For that matter, the majority of African American student athletes have felt, in different ways, the need to disprove racial stereotypes conveyed upon them in regards to academic competence (Fries-Britt & Griffin, 2007). Accordingly, within American society, African Americans are deemed and recognized as athletes and entertainers, but rarely as academicians or scholars. African American students are often praised for achievements athletically; however these same individuals that generate millions of dollars for their respective institutions, seemingly recognize that their academic achievements will be met with doubt, hesitation, or resentment. Furthermore, Solorzano, Allen, and Carroll (2000) as well as Soloranzo, Ceja, and Yosso (2000) note African American students reported many occurrences of campus members questioning academic ability; whereas they were seen as individuals that would not have been admitted into college without affirmative action. As a result, expectations for academic success and achievement are relatively low (Steel, 1997). African American students that were subjected to these stereotypes often attempt to resist and disprove negative assumptions about their intelligence (Solorzano, Allen, & Carroll, 2002). Thus for the purposes of this study, pursuing a graduate degree demonstrated academic motivation on behalf of the student.

Motivation has the ability to influence the specific goals of students (Singh, Singh, & Singh, 2012) more specifically African American student athletes; it helps them acquire knowledge, develop social qualities, increase initiation, improve performance and develop a sense of discipline. There has been debate, discussion, and dialogue in literature and research in regards to African American athletes and motivation. Furthermore, motivation and its usefulness in predicting athletic and academic success for African American student athletes continues to generate thought provoking discussions as well (Sellers, Chavous, & Brown, 2002). Specifically, motivation can be a useful predictor in both athletic and academic success.

Research literature on African American student athletes in regards to their motivation and academic performance, has received little attention. Critics have argued that revenue generating sport serves as training and recruiting agencies for African American athletes into professional sports; these sports become increasingly “professionalized,” encouraging participants to direct their primary attention to performing well at their sports in deference to doing well academically (Snyder, 1996). This perceived lack of motivation is often reflected in a general “disidentification” with school and reduced academic performance (Snyder, 1996; Snyder & Spreitzer, 1992). In other words, African American student athletes seem less willing to become motivated to transfer their athletic motivation into academic motivation (Simons, Van Rhee, & Covington, 1997). However, after processing their college careers after their eligibility expires, African American student athletes have to face reality and conclude that competitive athletics will no longer be a part of who they are or what they do.

However, there are several student athletes who are committed and motivated to succeed athletically as well as academically. These students are highly motivated to succeed without being afraid of failing (Snyder, 1996). They have a strong sense of self-worth, believe they have the ability to compete academically, have good study skills, are able to accurately judge the difficulty of tasks, and therefore expect to succeed and take pride in their academic achievements (Snyder, 1996). These students have a history of strong academic performance which reinforces their feelings of self-worth and gives them confidence in their ability to succeed academically (Snyder, 1996).

### *Summary*

This literature review, attempts to give the reader an understanding of African Americans and the obstacles they overcome in the realm of athletics and academics. This section highlighted the historical context of African Americans athletes, the integration of African American athletes at PWI's, the necessity of Critical Race Theory, and African American athlete experiences at PWI's. This literature review also illuminated African American athletes at PWI's and academics, connecting diversity, athletics and academics, African American students athletes and diversity, graduate school for African Americans at PWI's, and motivation.

Like many other walks of life, African Americans in regards to athletics and academics have initially been placed at a disadvantage due to numerous occurrences of racial discrimination, prejudices, and racial inequality. Throughout history, race has played an important role in the acceptance, rejection, and expectations of African American student athletes (Edwards, 2000). The involvement of African Americans in

athletics and academics has been turbulent. Furthermore, although some forms of racial discrimination have ceased other forms of discrimination and prejudices still occur in institutions of higher learning and in society. Racial stereotypes are nonetheless, ever apparent in these institutions as well. Throughout the readings, the summation from Wiggins (2007) noted that the more things change, the more they stay the same.

Furthermore, with the connection of athletic and academic literature, it is apparent, that throughout history, American society has recreated a system that can prevent large masses of populations from prospering in our society. American society is embedded with layers, complexity and unending questions. There are indeed inequalities when compared to dominant cultures, however, African American athletes have progressed a mighty long way. The ultimate question, however, whether the subject is athletics or academics, is how can we change this problematic system? These readings have expanded thoughts, opinions, and ideas that offer pathways for researchers to introduce possible solutions. By understanding our history and deconstructing society from a CRT perspective, we can begin to enlighten and empower ourselves, our students, and our student athletes. We can critically analyze, understand, and convey how power has the potential to maintain or change existing conditions. Once critical understanding occurs, creating an avenue for change is possible.

## **CHAPTER III**

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### *Introduction*

The methodology utilized within this study is exploratory and descriptive, with the intent to produce a clear, accurate portrayal of the perceptions of one group in a particular context, without looking for generalizable conclusions (Gonzalez, 2004). This study seeks the perceptions of African American athletes regarding motivational factors that lead to graduate school.

Cooley (2013) notes that many scholars and researchers seek to understand why groups of people develop civilization and behave systematically; however, other populations seemingly have so little in materialistic terms.” For that matter, Tylor (1871) conveys cultural evolution classifies societies into rigid hierarchies, played into racial classification and thereby assists institutionalization of societal prejudice against people of color. As misunderstandings remain, researchers, through qualitative practices, began to recognize the absolute anachronism of dominant views towards culture and race. Therefore, qualitative research provides future researchers with guidance on connecting the theoretical frameworks and the real-world experiences.

Qualitative research seeks to gain in depth knowledge of the particular study. Qualitative research also seeks to describe, to understand, and to explain the complexity of the organizations and the actors who work in them (Marshall & Rossman, 1989). Qualitative research allows various paradigms to be included in interpretive projects. The generic focus of qualitative research flows in five directions simultaneously, however, for

the purposes of this project, two are of utmost importance; these foci are; (1) the ethnographic, qualitative study, and representation of forms in everyday life; and (2) the investigation of new pedagogical and interpretive practices that interactively engage critical cultural analysis (Marshall and Rossman, 1989).

Scholars and researchers of athletics and academics have a unique position within American higher education (Cooley, 2013). These individuals are dynamic components of the plight of African American student athletes. Manifestations of reoccurring disparities within these contexts, along with evidence of academic discourse, often question the perceived value and interpretations of athletics and academics. There is a limited amount of research as it pertains to this population of African American students, more specifically African American male student athletes. Therefore it is obligatory to allow participants of this study to articulate viewpoints, experiences, perceptions, and beliefs as they are related to the research questions. Qualitative methodology is therefore beneficial for a study related to life transitions and experiences using these types of research techniques. Using qualitative techniques provides detailed description of issues and concerns regarding African American male student athletes. Additionally, qualitative studies provide depth and detail of research projects. Qualitative data also provides personal insights, and gives voice to participants; creating an approach that attempts to implement a critical interpretive approach that will help scholars and educators make sense of the daily situations these individuals are confined by (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005). For African American male student athletes are nonetheless, an important piece to campus life at many PWI's.



### *Research Design*

I utilized the qualitative research framework to gain an understanding of how these former student athletes were motivated to be successful both athletically and academically. Qualitative research revolves around a diverse, interrelated body of terms, concepts, and assumptions revolve around the term “qualitative research.” Nevertheless, Denzin and Lincoln (2005) define qualitative research as a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. Furthermore, the language used in qualitative research methods make the world noticeable. Qualitative researchers study existence in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them (Erlandson et al., 1993). Consequently, qualitative researchers use variations of interpretive practices, longing to have an improved understanding of respective subject matters.

Additionally, this research study operated within a case study method. Lincoln and Guba (1985) note that the case study method is the vehicle of choice for reporting the results of the study. Also, Borg and Gall (1983) state that a case study involves an investigator (i.e., myself as the researcher) who makes a detailed examination of a single subject, group, or phenomenon. Case studies should not however, be mistaken with narratives, which are much less complex than case studies and are written from only one view point (Merriam, 1988). The rationale for using the case study mode is that such a report form raises the reader’s level of understanding of the focus of the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Furthermore, case studies provide the reader an opportunity to probe for internal consistency and trustworthiness (Merriam, 1988). Also, case studies provide the

descriptions necessary for judgments of transferability between contexts (Merriam, 1988). The case study method involved former African American male student athletes who have persisted through graduate school and obtained a graduate degree. The intent of each case study was to expand the minimal foundation of research related to African American athletes and motivation. In order to develop a clear understanding of the participant's view of athletics and academics, this study investigated their lived experiences prior to college, through their collegiate athletic careers, as well as through graduate school.

#### *Background of the PWI*

The total undergraduate population of the university is over 27,000 and a total student population of over 31,000. For the purpose of this study, the university is referred to as Classic University. Today, approximately 6% of the undergraduates are African American and 55% are women. With regards to academic reputation of the institution, there is a 75% acceptance rate and has the fifth largest graduation rate in the region. Classic University is among the top five largest universities in the region.

In terms of its athletic reputation, this university has ranked first in its conference for all athletic programs three out of the last seven years. This ranking is based on the overall statistics of the Commissioner's Cup. The university's football program has won two conference championships two out of the last seven years. The baseball program has won conference championships four out the last seven years. Men's and Women's track have both won conference championships two out of the last seven years. Soccer and volleyball have both won one championship within the last seven years. Lastly, the athletic program has the highest graduation rate in their respective conference.

### *Participants*

In order to gather participants, purposeful sampling was used. Purposeful sampling attempts to include participants who have experienced the phenomenon under consideration and from those whom the researcher can learn the most (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Merriam, 1988; Turner, 2004). For this study, I interviewed four former African American student athletes who have attended a PWI in the state of Texas, participated in athletics for the full tenure of their eligibility, and entered a graduate program and earned a graduate degree after their eligibility has expired. Each participant received pseudonyms. These individuals have been selected in order to highlight athletic and academic experiences of student athletes who are African American males, have participated in athletics, attended PWI's, and have advanced to graduate school. The criteria for the selection of participants, as stated below in Table 3.1, were as follows:

- African American
- Male
- Participated in collegiate sport at a PWI
- Entered graduate school
- Earned a graduate degree

Name	Age	Parents	High School	Collegiate Sport	Major	Undergraduate/ Graduate Degree	Current Profession
Winslow Lawyer	30	Mother	City of Champions	Football	English	BA/JD	Attorney/NFL Agent
Norris Jazz	29	Both	Funky Town HS	Football	Physics	BS/MS	Musician
Nathan Principal	32	Grandparents	Texas Tradition	Football	Criminal Justice	BS/M.Ed.	Principal
Jacob Money	25	Both	Texas Speed	Track	Engineering	BS/MBA	Accountant

Table 3.1 (List of Participants)

### *Instrumentation*

In regards to qualitative research, Merriam (2010) states “the researcher is the primary instrument of data collection and analysis; the process is inductive; and the product is richly descriptive (p.14).” Lincoln and Guba (1985) also state:

“Naturalistic inquiry is always carried out- logically enough-in a natural setting. Such as contextual inquiry demands a human instrument, one fully adaptive to the indeterminate situation that will be encountered. The human instrument builds upon his or her tacit knowledge as much as, if not more than, upon propositional knowledge and uses methods that is appropriate to humanly implemented inquiry: interviews, observations, document analysis, unobstrusive clues, and the like. (p. 187)”

Accordingly, I am the primary instrument for this study. The participants are the primary source of data for this study.

### *Data Collection*

After participants were identified, they were asked to participate in the study. Specifically, participants were informed of the purpose of the study and the potential it may have on benefitting educators on better understand the career transitions and academic experiences of African American male student athletes at PWI’s. After agreeing to take part in the study, they understood that their commitment would be an interview with the possibility of a follow-up interview.

Accordingly, the participants participated in semi structured oral interviews through which their experiences, beliefs, and perceptions shaped the purpose the study

sought out to explore. Prior to interviewing the participants, informed consent was obtained. The participants were told that their responses will be recorded so that it could later be transcribed. I also reassured the participants of privacy, confidentiality, and inclusiveness. An interview protocol was developed following a review of literature while other questions surfaced do to my own experiences and interests that would provide information relating to the purpose of the study. The interview protocol, which can be found in Appendix B, consisted of the following main ideas to lead a robust, conversational type of interview: a) family and community background; (b) experiences as a student athlete prior to college; (c) deciding on a college to attend; (d) experiences as a student athlete while in college; (e) graduate school; and (f) life after graduate school. I interviewed each participant at least once, with most of the interviews ranging from one hour to one hour and 45 minutes in length. In order to prevent cancellations, delays or schedule conflicts, the interviews were scheduled at least two weeks in advance. Although the questions were developed prior to the interviews, the semi structured style of the interviews allowed the researcher to raise other questions surfaced during the course of the interviews based on their responses.

Each interview was recorded by a voice recorder with the consent of the participants. The voice recorder permitted me to review the interviews at any given time. This gave me the assurance that a full, in depth understanding of the data would persist. Furthermore, the responses from the interviews were transcribed by a transcription service and verified through comparison with the recording. Follow-up interviews were conducted

on an as needed basis after the transcripts were reviewed. The participants received a copy of the transcriptions for verification as well.

After each interview was conducted, notes taken during the interviews, otherwise known as field notes, were organized. Field notes were organized immediately following the interview in order to recollect other instances or statements that were not taken. Additionally, field notes allowed me to memorize specific statements and highlight important items for later review. The purpose of field notes is to compose a written protocol of dialogue, experiences, and descriptions of the experiences of the participants that directly or indirectly affected them. The field notes also were necessary in order to recount feelings and thoughts on the research. All field notes were kept in a specific location. This location consisted of interview recordings, transcriptions, and observations of the interviews. Also, in the field notes, non-verbal cues were included. Non-verbal cues included use of time, chronemics (pauses), volume, voice quality, and paralinguistics (inflectional patterns). Use of these non-verbal communication techniques were utilized to interpret expressions and responses through non-verbal characteristics. Also, I asked additional interview questions in order to gain a more in depth understanding of these non-verbal occurrences.

### *Trustworthiness*

Gaining trustworthiness is critical in naturalistic inquiry. Trustworthiness is established in a study by the use of techniques that provide truth value through credibility, applicability through transferability, consistency through dependability, and neutrality through confirmability (Merriam, 1988).

In order to establish credibility, prolonged engagement was utilized. Prolonged engagement provides the foundation for credibility by enabling the researcher to learn the culture of a social setting over an extended period of time. This technique also allows the researcher to build trust and develop a rapport with the respondents. Furthermore, in order to obtain credibility, triangulation of data was used. According to Lather (1986), triangulation is defined by multiple measures to include various data sources, methods, and theoretical schemes. Lincoln and Guba (1989) also state that each piece of information in the study should be expanded by at least one other source. Therefore, the triangulation of the data included interviews, field notes, and the literature. Thus, triangulation is needed for establishing credibility.

Member checking, is the most essential technique for establishing credibility (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). There are several benefits of member checking. According to Merriam (1988), member checking allows the participants to test categories, interpretations, and conclusions. In other words, this process involves participants verifying data and interpretations collected through the interviews (Turner, 2004). Member checking should not however, be confused with triangulation. Triangulation is a process that is carried out with data from one source checked with data from other sources (Merriam, 1988). Member checking is conducted continuously and is both formal and informal (Merriam, 1988). For example, member checking was done at the end of the interviews by summarizing the data and allowing the participants to correct interpretations, as well as during the interviews by verifying interpretations as well as through informal conversations with the participants.

Additionally, a reflexive journal was kept to establish credibility. The reflexive journal not only established credibility, it also is useful for the transferability, dependability, and confirmability of the study (Merriam, 1988). The reflexive journal is in part, a diary, in which the researcher, on a regular basis, records information (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This journal provides valuable information such as the researcher's schedule and logistics, insights, and reasons for methodological decisions (Merriam, 1988).

Due to the rigorousness of data collection and analysis, this study provides the reader with transferability. Transferability has been recommended as the qualitative counterpart for external validity (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Though the researcher only seeks to describe one specific situation and the meaning of that particular situation for the participants of the study, the reader of the specific study can apply the findings of the research to similar situations in which he or she is involved (Turner, 2004). Accordingly, this study seeks to allow the reader to transfer the information to different aspects of their specific situations. Lastly, I as the researcher can only provide the description necessary to enable someone interested in making a transfer to reach a conclusion about whether transfer can be contemplated as a possibility (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

An audit trail was established in order to obtain dependability and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1988). This allowed the researcher to determine the trustworthiness of the study. The audit trail consists of adequate records kept throughout the study. These records were: (a) raw data (interview protocol, field notes, transcriptions, other documents); (b) data reduction and analysis products (note cards, data analysis software); and (c) process notes (reflexive journal). Also, confirmability was utilized



during the data collection and analysis phase to verify and construct findings that may be important to expand upon what is already known about African American male student athletes.

The data collected for this study entailed four narratives of individual lived experiences. The open ended format of the questions allowed the participants to capture all areas of their experiences that they deemed important. This is reflected in the narratives of the participants. The participants in this study received a copy of the transcripts for review and clarification.

#### *Data Analysis*

It is not possible to understand human behavior without understanding the framework within which participants interpret their thoughts, emotions, and behavior (Marshall & Rossman, 1989). This research is grounded in the assumption that the features of their perspectives are constructed as interpretations by certain individuals. Denzin and Lincoln (1994) state that qualitative research is multi-purposed, for it involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter. Furthermore, the use of qualitative research enabled me to get a deeper understanding of the participants' perspectives as well as a greater interpretation of their expressions in their personal and professional lives. Also, the importance of contexts and the participants own perspective are highlighted. Accordingly, this study attempted to value subjective, personal meaning and definition, and commonalities.

Participant responses were analyzed for major themes that emerge and represent viewpoints and experiences of the group. The data was analyzed with the use of 3x5 note

cards as well as a data analyzing software named Atlas. The analyzing process focused on categorizing the major themes articulated in the interview process. All qualitative data analysis is inductive and comparative in the service of developing common themes or patterns that cut across the data (Merriam, 1988). As commonality in responses became evident, they were categorized for consideration. Thus, I as the researcher, examined, compared, and conceptualized all data and organized categories. The categorizing process for this study was initiated with a search within the individual case studies for data concerning general topics. The information was then reorganized into larger categories. Themes and concepts, as listed below in Table 3.2, emerged for deeper meaning and connection to other responses.

Intrinsic Motivation	Extrinsic Motivation
High Academic Expectations (Know Your Assignment)	Family Influence (Family over Everything)
High Athletic Expectations (Being the G.O.A.T.)	Community Influence/Tradition (Expect Greatness)
Strong Work Ethic (Hard Work and Dedication)	Social Influence (Be Mindful of the Company You Keep)
Discipline (Sub Theme) (Read Your Keys)	Teamwork (Sub Theme) (There is no I in Team)
Competitiveness (Sub Theme) (Win at all Costs)	Code Switching (Sub Theme) (Knowing how to play the game)

Table 3.2 (Data Analysis)

The end result of the project are overall descriptions that explained athletic expectations, academic expectations, and the graduate school experiences of the participants. The information in this study will be presented at conferences and in future research.

### *Interpretive Analysis*

In order to critically deconstruct the experiences of the participants of the study, interpretive analysis was used. Interpretive analysis was utilized to identify major themes and significant patterns in the interview process that might otherwise be missed. Interpretive analysis was used to describe and interpret students' thoughts through their oral verbalizations while they were engaged in the interview process. This type of analysis reveals implicit assumptions about individuals or situations, and make salient the sociocultural contexts in which conceptual metaphors occur (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Furthermore, interpretive analysis deconstructs understandings, experiences, perceptions, and realities of specific populations. Furthermore, understanding and experiencing complex or abstract ideas in terms of ordinary experiences is the aim for the use of interpretive analysis. The end result of the project will be overall descriptions that explain motivational factors that contribute to advancement into graduate school.

### *Summary*

Qualitative research methods were chosen and utilized for this study. Qualitative research was selected due to the nature of the study and my personal interests as well. I followed procedures in order to provide an in depth look at former African American male student athletes' that attended PWI's and their perceptions of motivational factors that

lead them to obtain graduate degrees. Additionally, I also investigated the meanings of their lived experiences through their perspectives and ideologies. It is through these individuals that others can be informed about the athletic and academic motivations of African American male student athletes. Accordingly, the results of this study may not reflect the expressions of different African American male student athletes at colleges or universities across the United States.

## CHAPTER IV

### FINDINGS

#### *Introduction*

In this study, I examined and interpreted the experiences of four male African American former student athletes from PWI's to determine motivational factors that influence their persistence to and through graduate school. In this chapter, I will present the motivational factors that lead to graduate school/degrees through my own eyes. I utilized their experiences in order to present the rich presentation of their ideas. Gonzalez (2004) notes "Context plays an important part in the moment of interpreting data. Without an understanding of the context of the participants, the results could emerge with no clear interpretation of the data. (pp.64)." Therefore, a brief introduction and their personal stories are included to underscore their realities. In order to interpret and present the data given, it is organized in the following manner (a) an introduction of each participant; and (b) a case-by-case review of interview responses. This section will be followed by an in depth analysis of the data with the emerging themes.

#### *Case Study #1 (The Playmaker)*

It is important to note the openness that Winslow provided throughout the interview. Winslow seemed very relaxed, comfortable, and trustworthy throughout the interview. Occasionally, both Winslow and I as the researcher expressed relatable occurrences throughout the interviews as well. Secondly, in conjunction with openness, it is imperative to mention that the participant revealed his innermost feelings and opinions,

from his childhood to adulthood. He was very confident in his expressions and statements in regards to race, education, and his motivational experiences.

*Introduction to Winslow Lawyer*

Winslow Lawyer is an African American male approximately 30 years of age. Winslow was raised in a middle class suburb located on the outskirts of a major urban population in the South. This suburb was predominately White. However, Winslow indicated that there was a diverse K-12 student population. Furthermore, Winslow indicated that a majority of the African American student population were primarily student athletes. Although the participant lived in a primarily White suburb, the participant was consistently surrounded by a diverse, urban population.

*“Getting Ready for the Season” (Research Question One)*

**“How do African American male student athletes who participated at PWI’s describe their athletic and academic experiences?”**

The first set of interview questions addressed research question number one. Winslow was born in the early 1980’s in Dallas, TX. Primarily, Winslow resided in the Dallas area throughout his life, with the exception of his college days. Also, he graduated from a high school in the Dallas area which is a growing athletic powerhouse in all sports. These statements led us into the next phase of questions. This phase focused on his social experiences during his K-12 days. Once again, Winslow offered valuable insight and reflection on how he viewed the world. He once again noted that at the time, his community was primarily a White, middle class community. However, he noted that many

of the athletes were primarily African Americans. The football and track teams, were primarily African American, with the exception of a few players. He offered a very important statement in regards to how he viewed this; he noted “I felt like it prepared me for the real world... there was a diverse student body and socioeconomic status... it did really well for me, preparing me for the real world.”

As a child, Winslow’s household consisted of three people; Winslow, his brother, and his mother. He noted that his dad left the house when he was eight years old. Although his dad was not formally in the house with the rest of his family, he noted that his father would see him every weekend from when he was eight up until he graduated high school. He also noted that his household primarily functioned on faith and Christianity. Winslow’s mother raised her family based on the principles of the Bible. Regarding academics, Winslow noted that “academics came first. Sports and extracurricular activities were, -- I don’t even want to say that it was second to academics but, they were more like third in line.” This frame of thinking was a result of his taking on the leadership role as “man” of the house. He had the responsibility of taking care of his little brother. Winslow was also the oldest grandchild as well.

Winslow was also a first generation college student, and was the first in his immediate family to attend and graduate from college. Winslow’s mom earned a high school diploma, and followed with a college degree in 2010. Winslow also graduated with his law degree in 2010. The participant had a great deal of understanding in regards to his mother not obtaining her bachelor’s degree. He understood that she was a single mother with two children; therefore, she could not earn her degree as quickly as she would have

liked. Winslow spoke very highly of his little brother as well. His brother is a football player for the Naval Academy and is on schedule to graduate with his bachelor's degree in the spring (2015).

Also, Winslow's mother was a cosmetology instructor. Currently, she is the dropout prevention coordinator for a high school in the Dallas area. He explained that his mother felt that her calling has always been education. He specifically noted:

“That was where she felt she was most effective. With her background... she was raised in the projects... she grew up basically poor... so she was able to relate to... a lot of the kids that struggle with education... or dropping out of school... so that is what she found most rewarding.”

From here, we discussed how his family influenced him athletically as well academically. To put things into perspective, Winslow noted that his mother was a “no nonsense” type of parent when it came to academics as she set very high standards for her children. For example, he made a reference to the no pass no play rule in Texas. For the K-12 population in the state of Texas, the lowest grade you could make in order to maintain eligibility for extracurricular competition was a 70 (C). Well, contrastingly, for Winslow and his brother, he could not bring home less than an 80 (B). She began this standard at a young age for him; therefore, it would not come as a surprise to him later in life. He stated that his mother did not want her children to be mediocre or just get by. She wanted them to be above the rest; compete at a high level academically. So that put Winslow on a path of what he specifically referred to as “the path for excellence.”



His father on the other hand, has been self-employed for the last 20 years. He runs his own printing press in the Dallas area as well.

Athletically, his father was the influence. He registered Winslow for all sports, took him to practice, and helped him out with the necessary requirements for him to succeed athletically. He noted that he also played for his father for about three seasons as well. His father also came to all of his games football games, from his childhood, on up through college, he came to all of his basketball games, and track meets as well. He noted that athletics was basically an avenue to keep their relationship alive. He also noted that his dad was able to relate to him due to his past as a football player; he had a high football IQ and they also played the same position as well. When the participant spoke on his dad, he seemed very humble in that he wanted to make him proud athletically. He noted:

“My parents had me right out of high school. So my dad basically forfeited all of his scholarship... opportunities he would have had to go to school... to stay home and raise a family... so I always kind of felt like that’s the least I could do was to... go out, play well, play hard for him... because of that sacrifice.”

Although Winslow noted that much of his athletic success is credited to his father, his mother on the other hand, would note that she is the sole reason for Winslow’s athletic success. During this segment of the interview, he laughed and joking explained how his mother always thought she was the one person who taught him how to throw a ball. Winslow, however, lightheartedly stated that “You and I went out in the yard one time. You told me how to throw a ball. And that is the exact reason why I played safety in college.” During this part of the interview specifically, Winslow seemed really proud of

his family; with his brother being able to play football and graduate from a premier institution, his mother helping out the youth in the community, as well as his father operating his own business, he seemed to take great pride in the accomplishments of his family.

After we discussed how his family influenced him athletically and academically, we discussed how the surrounding community influenced his athletic and academic success. Within the context of this interview, community members can consist of coaches, community leaders, teachers, neighborhoods, and others. Primarily, Winslow spoke on occurrences of coaches and community members/leaders. In this section, it was interesting to see that the interaction between his coaches and parents was mutually respected; meaning that the coaches were just that – coaches. He noted that his mother did not want him, or his brother to rely on any coach. He also noted that his mother made it very clear to the coaching staff that she did not want them to be the participant’s “daddy.” His mother did not allow the coaches to overstep their boundaries as far as parenting goes. For example, he made references to how in certain communities (i.e., suburban communities) coaches automatically assume that African American boys do not have a father figure around, therefore they keep they parents ”out of the loop” in regards to discipline.

During this section of the interview, Winslow really went into depth about the role of parents and coaches in regards to athletics. He seemed very firm in his statements and beliefs on the role of parents and the African American youth in the United States. For instance, Winslow noted:

“In some instances, I’ve seen where the parents have relinquished... their authority to these coaches and teachers, you know, even as it relates to getting a scholarship... they’re like, oh the coach is going to get my son a scholarship. Well, it’s not really the coach’s job. The coach’s job is coaching. Your job is to make sure your kid is getting seen... and so with me, coaching was just that... they coached.”

Outside of coaching, he noted that the community did not have a big influence on him. He noted that playing for his high school – often referred to as the “City of Champions” – there was a sense of pride where, they all as athletes, wanted to represent the [city]. He also stated that there was a lot of pressure on the student athletes growing up to maintain the legacy and represent themselves as well as the team and school in a certain fashion. He explained how the community he lived in was a fairly large community; however, there was only one high school. So therefore, as kids growing up in this community, everyone wanted to be a part of the tradition; this tradition was excellence. So to put this into perspective, his school had a tradition of excellence, and he did not want to be the person to cause that to deteriorate.

To magnify this excellence, Winslow played quarterback. The participant explicitly noted in a serious and prideful manner that the quarterback was “the mayor” of the city. These individuals had a legacy of being fast, tough, and extremely smart. They were members of the National Honor Society and straight “A” students. They also ran the hurdles in track. So up until his senior year of high school that is what the participant did; played quarterback at a high level, was in the National Honor Society, and ran hurdles.

That was expected of the quarterback. This type of tradition and expectation made the participant very honored. He thrived on those experiences and really enjoyed being part of that tradition. Outside of the legacy of his school, his biggest influence was his mother and his family – he wanted to make them all proud.

Accordingly, he was well decorated as far as his athletic and academic accomplishments. Winslow stated that he graduated in the top 10% of his graduating class. He was on the A/B Honor Roll, Academic All-State for football and track, and a member of the National Honor Society. Athletically, he was first team All-District in football, a two year letterman in football, All-State in track, as well as a three year letterman in track. On another note, he mentioned that his senior year was different due to his position change. For the first three seasons of his high school career, he played quarterback. However, due to a broken hand, he had to switch positions; he ended up playing defensive back. Again, he noted that he made first team All-District – unanimous first team All-District. He was proud, stating that there were only three student athletes in the entire district to receive such accomplishments. He also noted that he led the team in interceptions (even with a cast on his hand). So, in this instance, you could tell that he was very confident in his athletic ability.

This is where the interview took a turn. We then talked about his expectations to play collegiately and professionally. When we talked about these experiences, he seemingly laughed as though it was something that was unexpected. He noted that playing collegiately was not something that he initially thought of. He noted that he can remember the conversation “like it was yesterday.” He stated:

“Mama... you know [name anonymous]... [Anonymous] was a White guy... was one of my really good friends... you know [anonymous] said his parents are going to pay for school... and my mama said “What!?” I don’t have no money to pay for college! You better make sure you get a scholarship!” And I was like ok... I have to get a scholarship... one way or another... academically or athletically...”

He noted that initially, after hearing that from his mother, and with him being a first generation college student, he wanted to receive an academic scholarship. However, his athletic ability was noticed by one of his coaches, and told him and his mother that athletic scholarships were a better avenue, because they were full scholarships. So from that point, he wanted an athletic scholarship, and he noted “of course, like every kid, I wanted to play in the NFL.”

However, it seemed that Winslow had a valuable backup plan. Although the participant noted that he was successful in high school athletically and academically, he did not receive the initial recognition, as far as getting a scholarship is concerned. He noted that:

“It was... one of those things where nobody really wanted me, until everybody started to want me... it was a thing where I went from having... Division III schools to Division I... for it was interesting... not being wanted to being all of a sudden that guy...”

So that is when his backup plan came into existence. He knew that he was going to law school. He stated “I knew if I didn’t go to the league, my theory... was for a living. I’m either going to be hitting somebody or hitting some books.” He knew that if he did

not make it football, he would eventually go to law school and become an attorney. So for him, he knew he was going to graduate school. Therefore, in deciding on a college to attend, he did not care about the size of the school, how many times they played on television, or even how good the school was. Here, his confidence surfaced again; as he stated that he could single handedly change the entire program. Therefore, primarily, the only concern of Winslow when deciding on a college, the only thing that mattered was playing time; going somewhere he could play.

I was curious to know, after the participant made these statements, if he chose to forgo his opportunity to play in the NFL due to his immediate backup plan to attend graduate school. He was very sincere and confident in his response in regards to forgoing his NFL dreams. Here is his response:

“You can trust me. I wanted it more than anybody that you could imagine. I would have played in the NFL for \$60 thousand... \$50 thousand a year. I would’ve still wanted to play. I love the game of football. So... law school never got in the way of that dream... I was always prayerful about the pursuit of that career... I understood that if God had it for me... I would be in the NFL. Which is why I never got caught up like, oh I have to go to a big school to go to the NFL.”

This statement was interesting due to the fact that he still was encouraged enough to continue his dream, however, he realized that if it was in [His] will, it would be for him. Therefore, he did not panic; he understood how things were going to play out.

*“This is Why We Work So Hard” (Research Question Two)*

**“How does participation in collegiate sport influence educational experiences of African American male student athletes?”**

From this point in the interview, we discussed his experiences as a student athlete in college. We divided his experiences into three categories; academically, athletically, and socially. Academically, Winslow was an English major. He stated that he did not have a problem academically. He was a 4.0 student his last three to four semesters, he made the Dean’s List several times, he won the Martin Luther King, Jr. Essay Contest, and overall, he did well academically.

He also discussed how he became an English major. He stated that he went on a visit to the University of New Mexico and the academic counselor on the recruiting trip asked him what he wanted to major in. He replied “pre-law.” He let her know that he wanted to attend law school. Accordingly, she advised him that “pre-law” was not an actual major. So she then recommended him to become an English major or a political science major. She further stated that majoring in English prepares you for the intensive writing throughout law school. Therefore, that is how he ended up choosing a major of English. Also, I was interested to know if his athletic drive influenced him academically. This part of the interview was not expected on my behalf. Winslow, in response to this question, stated that this was exactly the opposite. He stated that his academic accomplishments made him more confident athletically. The better he did academically, the better he played. For instance, if he performed well on a test or quiz, then he was more

confident on the field. If he did poorly academically, it would be harder for him to focus on his play athletically.

Athletically, he described his experiences as challenging, but yet, he still enjoyed his athletic experiences. During this segment of the interview, we began to reflect on some of the past relationships and experiences we both had during our time on the same college team. It seemed as if we both enjoyed discussing memories of playing football. Accordingly, the participant noted that although he had three different coaching staffs, he was a four year starter. This was rewarding for the participant. He noted that he had to earn his spot three different times. He noted that despite the injuries that plagued him throughout his career, he survived the struggle. He felt as if they continuously wanted to replace him with someone who was bigger, faster, and stronger; however, he was determined to be the starter – be the best. For instance, in regards to him being the best, he stated:

“I’m a competitor... That’s just how I live life... I don’t care what it is, I’m going to always strive to be number one... I say... you can judge a competitor by what they do before and after a game. Everybody competes during a game, but... if you really want to know how much of a competitor he is, go... watch him at practice... no... watch him during summer workouts... then you know who really is a competitor... so for me, I did not want to sit on the bench... so I made sure I worked my butt off... I made sure I was not going to be outworked... I also made sure I knew my assignments... all of the defense... so I had confidence that I was going to be better than you.”



This mentality earned him a lot of respect from his teammates. Also athletically, he stated that he was an academic All-American three years, a first team All-Conference selection, as well as the Male Student Athlete of the Year. He also was a pre-season All-American his senior year, and he started all but one game his entire career.

Socially, Winslow described these experiences as “part of his success.” He noted that outside of football and academics, he really did not participate in anything. He was not part of any fraternity, any groups, or any organizations. He basically went to school, played football, and dated his girlfriend, who is currently his wife. He noted that while dating his then girlfriend, his grades continuously declined, stating that he did not receive below a 3.7 during that time in college. He also noted that his roommate dated his girlfriend’s best friend, so they went on movie nights as couples, but outside of that he was a “pretty laid back guy.”

*“Defining Your Legacy” (Research Question Three)*

**How do African American male student athletes describe the experiences that influenced them to persist through graduate school?”**

This phase addressed research question number three. This led us into the why he wanted to attend law school. Winslow noted that he originally wanted to be a veterinarian. He jokingly told the story of why he changed his mind for this career, and what interested him in becoming an attorney. He goes on to state:

“My freshman year of high school, we had to dissect an animal... this thing smelled funny, it’s disgusting... it’s terrible... I’m not doing it... so I realized that

I didn't want to become a veterinarian... so that's when I got involved in Teen Court... when somebody gets in trouble... you could be their attorney.. and represent them... you could try to get their punishment dismissed or reduced... it was exciting... a competitive program... and I liked the idea of winning... and beating my classmates.”

He also noted that he liked to research the district and school policies in order to help out his classmates. He jokingly stated that he was the “Johnny Cochran of Teen Court.” From here, we discussed his experiences as a law student. He stated that he applied to schools such as Harvard, Yale, SMU, Texas Wesleyan, TSU, and Emory. He noted that he applied to approximately fifty schools, due to his fee waiver, which waived his admissions costs. Therefore, he was able to apply to any school that he wanted because he did not have to pay the admissions fee.

He also shared his social experiences. These experiences were a combination of his days in high school, undergraduate days, as well as his days in law school. He noted that his experiences in high school as well as undergraduate, prepared him for his days in graduate school. He stated that as an athlete, he was surrounded by people of color, more specifically, African Americans. However, when he went to class, there was pressure to perform well academically. He also added that as an African American, he did not want others to marginalize him into any stereotypes. So that motivated him to be punctual, in his classes as well as his school work; he was proud to be an athlete, however, he did not want to come off as a jock. He noted that he did, indeed have challenging experiences with professors, who for whatever reason, did not want to do right by the participant. We

seemingly agreed and understood what this topic inferred. He noted that one incident, in regards to a professor (he did not want to go into much detail), it was a personal vendetta on him.

Expanding further on his experiences in law school, he stated that his biggest fear was getting called on. Getting called on demonstrated your knowledge or expertise on certain subject matters in a course. Although this was his biggest fear, he ironically was called on only twice, in three years of law school. He further explained that the one time he was called on by his professor; he let her know that this was a challenge for him. Winslow was able to have this conversation with the professor because of a healthy relationship. Through this relationship, they were able to work out their differences. He also noted that one professor, took an interest in him, personally. He was one of approximately four African American students in the entire school; so therefore, he took an interest in him. Winslow noted that “his swag level was a little different than those other guys.” We laughed and joked about this for a while. Accordingly, he stated that there were only 15 people in his program, 15 really intellectual people; however, he knew Winslow was the best advocate because he could do a good job and relate to children from certain communities.

Expanding on this, here is when his experiences in law school began to illuminate the hardships of the African American youth in the United States. He noted that he worked for a juvenile clinic while attending law school. His main job description while at this clinic was to represent children who had been in trouble with the law. And his professor knew he was going to do a good job talking to these children. Winslow notes:

“Me being an effective counsel... an effective attorney is more than just knowing the law, when you’re dealing with kids... getting kids out of trouble doesn’t help them in the long run... but can you keep a kid out of trouble – can you say something to keep him out of trouble – and that’s where I was one of his best students... I could relate to the kids.”

He proceeded to talk about some of the situations that these children were part of. For certain individuals, these realities seem alarming, frightening, and ultimately unreal. However, for many African Americans in America, this is the harsh reality. He highlighted instances in where he worked with 12 year old children who carried weapons such as oozyes, knives, and grenades; how 13 and 14 year old boys identified themselves as mercenaries; how children were self-proclaimed hit men. But Winslow also noted that these children did not brag about their situation. He noted that their situation was the only reality. For instance, in regards to the children he worked with, he stated:

“He’s talking about it like, you know if I could do something else, I would. But rather than have my mama and my sisters and brothers starve to death... if somebody can pay me you know... 15 hundred dollars to go take somebody’s life... I’m going to do it.”

This is where Winslow was able to make a difference. He was able to not only get them out of trouble, he was able to demonstrate to them that there was a different way; a different opportunity for them in life. That’s where he was able to become an advocate for the African American youth.

From here, I asked him how working with this type of population has helped him in his profession; how he has been able to relate to and succeed at helping his clients, African American youth, as well as African American athletes today. He credits his success to being a “renaissance man.” He states “that’s the guy who can do everything really well. He’s not just an athlete, not just an academic guy... he is able to relate to people... of all different walks of life.” He states that this quality is what benefits him as a lawyer. He gets the full truth out of his clients. He furthers this statement with this comment:

“He senses the real person in me and I can relate to him... I can speak his language. On the flipside of that, once I get into the courtroom... I can make the transition... I can now speak their language. So that ability... has allowed me to be successful in my life and my profession. And that is one of the traits that people in this profession would kill for... if you don’t know how to relate... you can only do one type of representation... likewise if you only know how to talk the street, you can’t go into these companies and try to get their... business... they will be like... you don’t carry yourself like the corporate attorney we’d like for you to be... you have to know how to make those transitions.”

This skill requires practice and it takes time to develop. Therefore I wanted to know how he was able to acquire this skill. First, his mother had a practical way of teaching him how to speak properly. He notes that his mother knew he wanted to become a professional athlete, therefore after his games, she would interview him. However, he was not allowed to say words like “um” or “you know” or “you what I’m saying.” So

through this type of practice, he was able to practice his speaking skills. Secondly, he noted that his parents came from the projects. However, publically, one could not see that if you would speak to them. However, in a private setting some of their more “real” personalities would surface. So he was able to handle and conduct himself in a certain way in public, however, around family, he was comfortable enough to just be himself. He understood this. He jokingly noted “You can’t keep it real all the time. Keeping it real all the time keeps you broke. You better have enough sense to realize that there’s a time and a place to keep it real.”

As we concluded the interview, we discussed what he would tell African American male aspiring athletes. Winslow chose to break his answer down into two different parts. He first began with a statement on what he would tell a young athlete. He stated that he would tell young athletes (K-12 athletes) to make academics a main priority. He specifically stated “because if you don’t do that, you don’t even give yourself a chance to go off to college, and if you don’t go off to college, you can hang up going to the NFL.” He sternly asserted that aspiring African American athletes have to fight the urge to put academics on the backburner. “Fight the urge that your athleticism will overcome... any academic... deficiencies you have...” he noted. He makes this statement more interesting. He notes that more of the top athletes are now coming from suburbs or prep schools. We both agreed that this was definitely not the case when we played. To highlight this statement, he notes:

“Think about the Russell Wilsons... the Kaepernickicks... those guys are crazy athletes, but they are no dummies. So the fact is... the competition has changed

dramatically... no longer can you be a good athlete and think that's good enough... because now there are good athletes who are achieving great things academically.”

For older athletes (in college and beyond) he would let them know that athletics will end someday, so therefore, they should want to get their degree. “Don't allow the school to use you... but get... all you can get out of academics and your scholarship.” He further notes that African American athletes should not take the easy route. He asserts that student athletes should get a degree that holds weight. “Get a degree where you are going to leave college with a trade or skill” he notes. Athletically he noted that you have to be consumed with not being outworked or outplayed, because, he states “you really can't control anybody else's performance... but you can control how hard you work.”

I found it interesting that he said this because he is an NFL agent as well. He sees football players on a regular basis, and he carries this mentality over to his athletes. He also states that being an athlete and then going off to law school, put him in a position to utilize what he has learned as an athlete and transition that expertise, not only the intangible expertise such as teamwork and discipline, but the actual knowledge of the game. This has helped him directly.

He also offered words of wisdom to the African American community as a whole. Winslow states that we as African Americans have a choice to take advantage of the available resources and opportunities, unlike our “forefathers.” This is another part of the interview that began to become interesting. He noted that “there's been enough research to done at this point to show that certain things lead to our... destruction... but we keep doing it.” I asked him to explain further. He notes:

“I mean such as alcoholism, such as broken homes, such as drug use, such as terrible spending habits, such as awful diets... like ok, dude... if you’re smoking weed, it’s going to affect you... running off on your kids and family... that is leading to drop outs and all the drama you get with it... early on you can say, well, maybe that was just a coincidence. But it ain’t no coincidence now... we think we can sometimes continue to do the same thing and get different results.”

From here, his words of wisdom resonated in me. He went on to say another powerful statement:

“You’re modeling for your athletes... even for the younger guys... you understand the influence... young guys are going to look at you... just like they looked at me... they’ll be encouraged and thrown off at the same time... because they haven’t realized that we can have nice things... make money... get an education, and don’t have to lose your swag... talking to kids... they’re always throwed off when they realize I’m an attorney... because the only professional they see are White guys... so when they see Black professionals... they’re like... he ain’t me.”

The last part of the interview touched on how he felt education was viewed by society. He stated:

“The thought is to get an education, to better yourself means that on some subconscious level you have to sell out... that don’t say that... but... think that... that hurts us... nobody ever claims somebody is keeping it real if they’re a football player... you know he real. But if you’re a professional, doctor, or a lawyer, now they want to question whether you’re real or not... people just assume that you



lose part of yourself because you start reading yourself. But that's not the case... but people have adopted that mindset.”

#### *Case Study #2 (The Team Player)*

Norris Jazz is an also an African American male 29 years of age. Norris was born and raised in a primarily urban community in a relatively large city in a Southern state. Norris indicated that there he grew up in the “hood,” however, the student population he was surrounded with, being in AP classes was a diverse group of students; however the student athletes are primarily African American. Also, he noted that many of his surrounding friends were a few years older than him, or a couple years younger than him. This also has shaped his experiences as well.

#### *Introduction to Norris Jazz*

Norris was very open as well during the interview process. He seemed very enthusiastic about conducting this interview. He was eager and pleased that this interview would take place. He was very honest and open in his responses, which gave the interview much needed value. His perspective throughout the interview was very insightful and it gives the research a greater context. Like Winslow, there are many life experiences that have shaped the perspectives and realities of Norris. However, his experiences are do not mimic those of Winslow. Therefore his views and perspectives offer different, yet valuable insight to this study.

*“Getting Ready for the Season” (Research Question One)*

**“How do African American male student athletes who participated at PWI’s describe their athletic and academic experiences?”**

Norris grew up in a household with both of his parents. Educationally, they both graduated with their associate degrees from a small community college located in the same community where he grew up. Athletically, his mother participated in volleyball as a K-12 student, while his father could not participate in athletics due to a sports hernia. While he asserted that his mother was a decent volleyball player, he credits the “athlete” of the family to his uncle. He noted that this particular uncle still holds several records at his high school including long jump and 100 meter dash. Also, he had a pretty close knit family; he saw his mother’s sisters and brothers every Sunday after church to have Sunday dinner. Occupationally, Norris’s father has worked for the postal service for approximately 30 years. His mother on the other hand was an administrative assistant before he began elementary school; from then on, his mother began working for different high schools in his community as a data clerk for their front offices. He also noted that his parents, more specifically his mother (with her background being in schools), did not necessarily influence him per se on his educational goals. He stated that:

“Both my parents just encouraged me to do... the best I could do, with... whatever I was doing. I don’t think it mattered if it was sports... academics... music... learning something for a Christmas play at church... they just always encouraged... me to do the best I could...”

Academically, he stated that at an early age his parents instilled a hard work ethic in his academics. He specifically noted that he grew up in the “spare the rod, spoil the child” age, therefore, by the time he was old enough to attend school, he made it up in his mind that he did not want to bring home anything less than an A or a B. That was instilled in him early. Furthermore, he stated that he tried his best to stay out of trouble and focus on the stuff that mattered.

This led us into the next portion of the interview. This portion had to deal with athletics. Norris stated that he began playing football when he was around the age of six. From the time he could play football, beginning at the Pee Wee ranks, that’s when he started and he never stopped. Norris also noted that although he began playing football at a young age, it was still a big deal for him and his family; however, he still enjoyed playing the game. He noted that it was “the best of both worlds.” His parents did not make him play, he wanted to play. His father ended up coaching him as well, and his family supported him at all of his games.

He also noted that because of dominoes, he was always able to see a pattern; he was always “ahead of the rest” as he specifically stated. On the other hand, he naturally wasn’t gifted in reading and language. He realized that if was good at one subject, he was going to be good at another. This in turn motivated him to work harder at both reading and language in order to succeed at all subjects.

Norris also noted that the surrounding community knew each other and had a great relationship. He also stated that once he attended high school, the relationship he had with other athletes grew because they played against each other since they were in elementary

school. This changed his mind frame on athletics as well. He stated that in his community, the relationships with other athletes in turn made them play harder, because they did not want to lose.

Additionally, he notes that he was in an AP with the same teacher as well as the same 20 students from the sixth grade up until he graduated high school. He noted “that was a huge impact for me. We all got to stay together and grow together.” He expanded on this group of students stating that they weren’t primarily athletes. Once they attended second grade, that’s when he, as well as his peers began to notice the separation. He asserted that these students worked a little harder than others and understood subjects faster as well. He calls this group of students “the nerds of the school.” Accordingly, he notes that this was great for him because he was surrounded by great students as well as great athletes. So this influenced him to try to compete with the best. He noted that as a kid, when you’re surrounded by talent both athletically and academically, when you’re surrounded by that type of athleticism and intelligence, he just wanted to keep up with his peers. He goes on to state:

“That’s what it was there. I’m a product of my environment. There wasn’t... a conscience decision to you know... I’m going to do the best I can on this test to be smart... I’m going to go out on the field and do the best I can do... to smack this dude on the next play. You just... the people around you are good... so I wanted to be good.”

Accordingly, as he spoke on this, he seemed as if he was confident in his ability to compete with the best. Norris indicated that he was one of the best athletes during his time

as well one of the best intellectually. Academically, he expanded on this, stating that math was primarily his strongest and best subject. Therefore, these experiences really gave him an edge on math at an early age.

We moved into his athletic and academic accolades from here. He was an accomplished student athlete. He made the honor roll, he was All-District as well as All-State in football, and he also made the Junior Olympics in track and field for the shot put. Academically, he went to several UIL competitions for math and was consistently a first or second place finisher. Norris also discussed that although he was good in math, he had dreams of playing in college as well as the NFL up and through high school. He states:

“I knew I was going to play college football somewhere... and... also at the time I had dreams of playing in the league. So that was always an option for me... I was still good academically, but that wasn’t a passion of mine. My passion was sports at the time.”

Although Norris had dreams of playing in the NFL, he had a humbling experience during his recruiting process. He notes that this process was “nerve wrecking” because he had peers that went off to big time Division I universities, while he was overlooked due to his size and the position he played. He humbly stated “that was the first time that really wasn’t the cream of the crop.” He went to say that initially he was bitter, because talent wise, he was much more capable than the others that went to bigger and better schools. He also stated that he, like many other children, wanted to play on the biggest stage, with the most fans, the most television games, and the biggest programs. Therefore, at the age

of 16 and 17, he really was not concerned about academics initially when he was being recruited by colleges.

Accordingly, he was not worried; he knew that something good was going to happen during this experience. Also, he notes that his parents were very supportive because of his reputation; he had a very good reputation of being a planner and making smart, informed decisions. He does, however go on to note that his father wanted him to attend the Naval Academy, once they entered the recruiting process. This came from his father being in the Air Force; he had a military background so he knew what the military could do for Norris in the long run. Even though this was where his father wanted him to go, he still supported him throughout this process.

*“This is Why We Work So Hard” (Research Question Two )*

**“How does participation in collegiate sport influence educational experiences of African American male student athletes?”**

After we discussed Norris’s recruiting process, we then went into how he decided on a school to attend. When speaking on this topic, he seemed to laugh and joke about how he initially did not connect the school to being the “actual” Navy. He quotes:

“Being from the south... unless you stay in Galveston or Corpus Christi or a city that’s from the coast... we all know in...north Texas, we don’t know nothing about no Navy... pretty much the only thing we knew about the Navy was the Army, Navy game that happens every year... I never really conceptualize that the Navy

was actually like a military school and Naval Academy... I didn't know that until I started being recruited by those teams.”

He went on to say that once he started doing his research on the Naval Academy; he realized that they played three big games on ABC every year. Once Norris noticed that he would play on television every year, he noted that “everything else was a side note.” At the same time, Norris realized that the Naval Academy is one of the top schools academically. So, while paid close attention to the athletic exposure the Naval Academy would bring him, he also noticed that he would have a nice background to fall back on. Accordingly, that was the thought process that he described when choosing the naval academy. He also went on to explain to explain that many of the athletes were at the top of their classes academically. In order to attend the Naval Academy, the student athletes had to have excellent grades and excellent SAT scores. Furthermore, he noted that you had to have a personal letter from your congressman. Additionally, he reflected on his experiences at the Naval Academy Prep School. While he explained these experiences, his tone changed. Here are his comments in regards to his actual schedule in the Naval Academy Prep School. He states:

“First we had boot camp... it was a pretty rigid schedule... every day... I still remember the schedule now... you wake up at like 4:30 or 5, do your morning PT, get breakfast... there is an early morning extra hour of instruction, go to class... all day, get out. They let the athletes out at... 3 or 4... do our practice... studied from 6-10... 10-10:30 was our personal time... 10:30-11 was shower time... go to sleep, wake up and do the same thing every day.”

After he stated this rigorous schedule, he noted that he was already disciplined as a student throughout his K-12 life, therefore he really did not have a difficult time as a student athlete with this schedule. He noted that this lifestyle lasted from about late May until approximately Christmas time. During this segment of the interview, he relayed to me that he understood he had to serve at least four or five years after he graduated from the Naval Academy. He states that at the time, he was 17 years old. He specifically states “that’s ten years... 17-27... the best years of my life... I’m not going to spend that time in the military if I don’t have to.” Once he realized this, he opted into playing for another school. He specifically was interested in one school, because two of his closest friends attended this school. So in choosing his next school, he factored in his friendships with his two close friends, as well as academics. Norris specifically states that as he cared about his athletic goals, he knew at his size, and at his position, as well as the talent level that surrounded him, he noticed that too many factors were working against him. Therefore, that prompted him to think more academically. Specifically, he was interested in the math program.

Norris then began to describe his athletic and academic experiences at his new school. He states “coming from a military school, it was so easy.” He furthers this statement by describing his class schedule as being not as rigorous; he compared the military school to having seven classes a day, while his new school only had about three classes a day. He was also excited to wake up at 7 AM as opposed to 4:30 AM. We both laughed at these comments. He expanded on these comments by stating that every semester, he enrolled in eight AM classes, whenever they were available. Furthermore,



after noticing other students and their study habits, he made it a point to outwork others just to get ahead. He stated:

“When I was in military school, I had the schedule every day from 6 AM to 7 AM... that was study time. And then from 6 PM to 10 PM was study time. So that’s five hours every day. So I kind of just told myself... I can study half that time and still be above the rest... so after football... I went and studied from 7 to 10 everyday... No matter if it was a test... if it was homework... I just found something to do from 7 to 10... I just wanted to keep that trend going while it was already instilled in me.”

After these comments, he credits military life to him being the person he is today; a hardworking man that is able to relate to most people. Continuing the interview, he noted that neither academics nor athletics had influenced the success of one another. By this, he meant that academics did not influence his athletic success, and vice versa. He simply reiterated that “the more time spend being the best person you can be, the less time you spend doing something you have no business doing.” He stated that was a primary reason he was involved heavily in athletics and academics; his grandmother and his mom told him at an early age “idle minds are a devil’s playground.” There for he was involved in many things to keep his mind going.

This is where he began to discuss his music career. He stated that if he could divide his life into equal parts, it would be athletics, academics, and music. Norris played the guitar, more specifically the bass guitar. He bought his first guitar as a senior in high school. He also stated that he would practice on a consistent basis throughout his time in

college (outside of the Naval Academy). From this point, we went into his athletic and academic accomplishments. Academically, he made the Dean's List every semester as well as the top math performer in his department on a consistent basis. Athletically, he was invited to the Waldorf College Hall of Fame, he was an Academic All-American, and an All-Conference selection.

After this segment of the interview, we discussed his social experiences. This part of the conversation was interesting. He asserted that he was a person that can relate to anybody; he was able to be "cool" with a big part of the student body. He noted that he grew up in the "hood," but people would not consider him a "hood" person. He noted "I grew up in that environment so I'm not a total square. Even if I am a square, I still give off vibes of that life." Furthering this statement, he stated that he never felt like an outcast; he fit in with smart people who focused on academics and at the same time, he could fit in with his athletic friends as well as the general student population. He noted that he wasn't much of a partier either.

*"Defining Your Legacy" (Research Question Three)*

**"How do African American male student athletes describe the experiences that influenced them to persist through graduate school?"**

Accordingly, we went into his decision to attend graduate school. His decision was prompted by his early graduation; he graduate with his bachelor's degree his junior year of college. That is when his focus really started to shift more towards academics, and less towards a career in football. He states:

“So once that decision was made – ok I’m done with my math degree... do I want to double major or get a graduate degree... it was a no brainer for me... once you get out with a graduate degree, especially in physics... if you’re going to a tech related field... that looks way better than a double major... so that’s really why I went for a graduate degree. It was better than a double major.”

His decision to get a graduate degree was also influenced by one of his closest friends at the time as well as what the college offered. He noted that the school did not have an engineering path; no electrical engineering; industrial engineering is construction at this particular college; and a graduate degree in math was not versatile to Norris. Therefore he decided to go into physics.

So because of this, he made remarks about socializing with a different group of people on a more consistent basis. These people were the people in his physics department. He stated that in the physics department, there was a lot of homework and assignments, therefore it was a lot of studying involved, and not too many people can complete these assignments by themselves. Furthermore, he notes that through his graduate degree as well as his football career he was able to maintain his discipline. He states that he was able to stay in the middle ground of being in an environment that was very rigorous, to an environment that was very lenient. He constantly tried to maintain that middle ground in order to succeed.

After this, he chose to go back into a subject that we touched on earlier in the interview. He discussed how he was able to fit in so well with different groups. He attributes this to his race. He noted that growing up, his community was primarily African

American. However, in his gifted and talented classes, many of the students were White. He also had a close friend, (the friend that influenced him to attend graduate school) who was White as well. He went on to state that these relationships were very formative in his social upbringing; he was able to be exposed to different cultures early, therefore he wasn't in "shock" once he entered college. Establishing those relationships early was a big part of his success. He states:

"Man, going all the way back to elementary school... I was able to be... like a chameleon socially.... Hang out with this group of people... hang out with that group of people and still be relevant... another part of that is race. My neighborhood was... predominately Black... my football teams growing up were Black. But... since I was always in gifted and talented classes, 90% of those classes were White... One of my best friends... his parents were White... I was able to be exposed to different cultures so I wasn't in shock once I went to college.... So I think that played a huge part in my upbringing socially."

We then discussed the qualities that have carried over from his graduate degree as well as his football career. He noted that the biggest quality would be teamwork. He notes that as a student athlete in college, you have the concept of playing your role; doing your part in order to for the entire group or team to succeed. He also stated that being a student athlete was an advantage because he was able to understand teamwork better when he went to graduate school. He stated:

"If you don't go play sports in college, you just kind of go to school. You do your work, you make sure you're getting the best grade... and you do this by yourself,

with no help from anybody... you do this... for four years. So then when you go in the workforce and you have to depend on other people... you don't have any concept of... I do the best I can do, but also, make sure that I'm helping out my team, so the team looks better.”

Another aspect of his graduate school and football days that he carries over is work ethic. He states that hard work and discipline were able to sustain his success both athletically and academically. He also stated that was a big motivational factor for him once he entered the workforce. Norris goes on to state that as far as teamwork is concerned, he carries this over into his band as well. He discusses how a band needs to play together in order for them to sound well; everyone has to play their role. He also talks about how in order for musicians to become successful, they have to learn how to not only play their role musically, but they have to the same administratively; meaning they have to be punctual, keep up with a calendar, spreadsheets, word documents, and other duties. So he reiterated that these skills, as far as teamwork is concerned, carries over into every aspect of his life.

Furthermore, he asserts that if there were anything he would advise a young African American male athlete who is up and coming, he would tell them that “work ethic and character are the two things that are going to elevate you to being the best that you can possibly be and keep you there above the rest.” For example, he quotes:

“No matter if you're on the football team or... if you're working at McDonald's – the person that you're working for... you want trust and if you've got a good work ethic and character... they can always depend on you to do the right thing, when

they are looking or not looking... that trust... is going to always keep you employed... its going to keep you on the field... those things apply to whatever profession you have... and for work ethic in school... that's a no brainer... do your homework, study, make sure you're fully prepared... that's determined by work ethic.”

### *Case Study #3 (The Role Player)*

Nathan Principal is an African American male who is 31 years of age. Nathan was born and raised in an urban community located in the third largest city in a state located in the southwestern region of the United States. Nathan did not grow up with his biological parents; rather, he was raised by grandparents. He also has a younger brother. His K-12 life was based in a legendary high school, which has a winning tradition and consistently produces many of the best athletes from this state. Furthermore, he is a member of a prestigious Greek fraternity, Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, Inc. and an assistant principal in one of the largest cities in his home state. Nathan's family also has a military background as well.

### *Introduction to Nathan Principal*

Nathan was very enthused about conducting the interview. His responses were interesting. His background of an educator, an athlete, as well as a Greek member, offers a unique perspective on motivation for African American student athletes. He was very assertive in his comments and offered a unique perspective on his views of the African American community.

*“Getting Ready for the Season” (Research Question One)*

**“How do African American male student athletes who participated at PWI’s describe their athletic and academic experiences?”**

Nathan was raised by his grandparents. Educationally, he mentioned that most of the members in his family have a high school education. He does mention that he has an aunt who graduated from college, his sister has her associate’s degree, and a few family members are nurses. These individuals, however, did not receive their degrees until later in their lives, respectively. Nathan is the first male in his family to receive a degree as well. Nathan also mentioned that he has a fairly athletic family. He notes that his father was a basketball player, his grandfather played basketball and baseball, and his sister played various sports. The participant also has an aunt who ran track; however, Nathan notes that he was primarily, the most well rounded athlete in his family.

After speaking on his family background, we then went into how his family influenced him academically. He notes that outside of his grandparents, he did not have much influence. During this portion of the interview process, he reflected on how his grandparents did their best to help him academically. He noted that his grandparents were much older, therefore they could not help him with a lot of his work; however, he did state that when he did need help, they made sure that that his teachers and educators assisted him in solving his academic issues. He also noted that his grandparents ensured that his work was completed on a daily basis.

Furthermore, Nathan stated that he did his best with academics; he was much disciplined due to his participation in athletics. He mentioned “I did not want to fail because of sports.” He also noted that he did not want to miss games because of failing classes; therefore he was very focused in his studies. He attributed his academic focus to the expectations of his high school. Nathan mentioned that his high is a football powerhouse (statewide and nationally), therefore they (the student athletes) were trained in a certain fashion; they were in deed athletes, however, the coaching staff as well as the teachers made sure that they were good students. He notes:

“We were held to a higher expectation than most... they expected more from us. We were put on a pedestal... so anytime we did anything – positive or negative – there was an awareness to it... they expected a lot from us because of the tradition of the district and the school... we were supposed to do right... we were supposed to be successful... on the field and in the class.”

When he made these statements, he seemed very proud and honored of the tradition he once represented. He mentions that this was more of a culture, a lifestyle that all student athletes adopted. He reflected back to his days as a Pee Wee football player; he noted that tradition was instilled in him due to the fact that his coaches, his teammates, his fans – they all had brothers, uncles, and fathers, who were previously part of his high school, winning tradition. This expectation made them perform at a high level academically and athletically because of who they represented. Furthermore, his high school had well of 4,000 students, which meant that his high school was talent rich athletically and academically. He also noted that representing his high school kept him out of trouble and



prevented him from failing any classes. He mentioned that he did not want to answer to the coaching staff, miss games, or practices because of academics or conduct. So therefore athletics was the key to keeping him “in line” as he states.

Nathan was also a well decorated student athlete in his K-12 career. The participant played baseball, football, and ran track, however, after his sophomore year, he only participated in football and track. Nathan was a two year letterman in football, a one year letterman in track, he was second team All-State in football, an All-District performer, and he also had seven interceptions his junior year. Academically, he was on the A/B Honor Roll every six weeks term. He also notes that his grandmother made him attend school every day; he never missed school.

From here, we discussed his aspirations on playing football collegiately and professionally. Nathan noted that for him, he always knew that he wanted to play football collegiately. He made it a point to play football in college, for the specific reason that he did not want his grandparents to have to pay for college. However, he stated that he really did not have big dreams on playing in the NFL. He notes:

“I don’t think I was ever one of those kids like, yeah my dream was to go to the NFL... win Super Bowls, or things like that... I had that sense of how difficult it was... but I did make it a goal to go to college... I wanted a scholarship.”

Nathan, during this segment of the interview, noted that while he was recruited, he went on all of his recruiting trips by alone. He reiterated that his parents were not in his life at the time, it was only his grandparents. Accordingly, they trusted him that he would make the best decision on selecting a college. Furthermore, he elaborated on his focus in

choosing a college to represent. He noted that his main focus were the people. By this, he meant how he felt around his future teammates as well as the surrounding area. He gives an in depth example of a specific recruiting visit:

“I guess the guy that was my host... he was the starting cornerback... he was a freshman... I really didn’t get that... feeling to where he was... really trying to recruit me strong... I guess he felt like I was going to be a threat... it was just awkward the whole weekend... they offered me a scholarship... but there was a feeling of discomfort... that’s what made ... as far as my trip to [the school he went to play for]... I just really felt comfortable. Everybody was cool... the people outside of athletics were cool... they just made you feel comfortable... like they really wanted you to be there.”

*“This is Why We Work So Hard” (Research Question Two)*

**“How does participation in collegiate sport influence educational experiences of African American male student athletes?”**

We then discussed his experiences as a student athlete at his college. Academically, he stated that it was fairly easy. However, he did acknowledge that it was difficult transition from high school as far not having someone to make sure he went to class and complete all of his work. This was the most difficult transition for him in that regard; but academically, he stated that came easy to him. He noted that his grades were decent, but going to class and waking up on his own were aspects of college that he struggled with.

Additionally, he noted that his decision to become a criminal justice major was sparked from a class high school. Nathan was interested in that field before he went to college. The participant knew initially that he did not know what he wanted to do with that type of major, however, he knew that this major was very versatile. Therefore he majored in criminal justice and minored in sociology. He stated that it was a “strategic pick” on his behalf because he wanted to understand how laws work when dealing with people as well as how society operates. That was his reasoning for picking his major and minor. Also, he noted that many of his decisions throughout college were made on his own. He was used making informed decisions on his own, therefore he felt comfortable in making these types of decisions without the help or guidance from others. Nathan also noted that his academic performance was indirectly influenced by athletic participation. He noted that it more or less, the same type of thought process collegiately as it was in his high school days. The difference here, he stated was there was not a formal six weeks period; rather, he made sure that he maintained his grades throughout the semester so he could be eligible for the following year. The participant also noted that athletics made him keep a high enough GPA in order to maintain his eligibility.

Athletically, he fared well; he was a two year starter and an All-Conference selection his senior year. He noted that athletics came easy to him in college as well. He was a natural player. Another part of his athletic success he mentioned was his knowledge of the game of football. Reflecting on his college days, he knew he wasn’t the fastest, the biggest, or the most athletic player. However, because he was a “student” of the game, he excelled at his position. Nathan noted that because he was very analytical, he looked at

everything, not just the person he went against. This skill made him more successful at his position. During this section of the interview he made a great statement in regards to his success in the game of football. He states:

“I looked at everything... I looked at where you lined up... I looked at tendencies... what plays they run out of certain formations... so once you learn the game... it makes you a like a step quicker than everybody because you know what’s going to happen 90% of the time... the other 10% you might get burnt but... I was usually right.”

Next, we discussed his involvement in other campus organizations. Nathan is a member of Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity Inc. He entered this fraternity his junior year of college. During his time this organization; he was the Sergeant of Arms, Vice President, as well as the Membership Intake Dean. During our discussion here, he reflected on how Kappa influenced him. He stated that “Kappa definitely opened up my mind.” Expanding on this statement, he noted that this fraternity expanded the business side of him and made him become more analytical. Being a member of this organization made him think about his future career because of his interaction with other members of the fraternity. For example, he states:

“I looked at how they did things... I focused more in the classroom... so I can set myself up to go to grad school if I want to go to grad school or go to law school if I want to go to law school. So I think after Kappa... my GPA went up because I focused more.”

*“Defining Your Legacy” (Research Question Three)*

**“How do African American male student athletes describe the experiences that influenced them to persist through graduate school?”**

After we discussed his experiences in his fraternity, we then moved to his experiences as a graduate student. Nathan was very open about his decision to become a graduate student. He stated that he was back home and pondered on what he wanted to do with his life. He entertained the decision to become a teacher; however, teaching wasn't his passion. He claimed that teaching would not maximize his intellectual potential; he asserted that he was more of a planner, a decision maker, and he noted that he was the type of person who wanted to implement systems. After he carefully thought about this, Nathan decided to apply to graduate school. He applied to the college in where he was a student athlete, as well as a Historically Black College and University (HBCU). He noted that he was accepted into both schools; however, he wanted to have the experience of attending an HBCU. Therefore he attended an HBCU located in an urban community in the fourth largest city in the United States. While attending this school, he majored in Urban Education leadership and Administration. He stated he chose this major because it would teach him how to become a leader in urban communities.

Furthermore, he described his classroom experiences as more intimate. He stated “I went from having a classroom of four or five hundred at my previous school, a class of four or five people.” He states that although this was different, he acknowledged that this

experience helped assisted him in class attendance and class participation. For example he posited:

“I had to read and I had to participate in class... I never was really a big talker before I got to grad school... you have to be present... so that’s when I found out I could actually talk... and use my words being in grad school because it forced it out of you. We had to do that in class.”

While we discussed his experiences in graduate school, he seemed very pleased about the education he received from this school. He noted that everything that he learned while getting his master’s degree, he has applied to his profession toady. This is when we discussed what he has learned from athletics as well as graduate school, as well as how he applies them today; not only as an assistant principal, but as a man in general. Nathan stated that he carries over discipline and hard work from athletics. Here are his comments:

“Be disciplined enough to reach that goal... hard work – life is not easy at all and sports definitely prepares you for that... because you’re out there every day, when everybody is in the dorms or at home in the A/C and we’re out there – its three o’clock... in the middle of the day and we’re working... with full pads on... sweating and hitting each other... that’s hard... not a lot of people can do that... that’s why everybody can’t go to college and play football... because it’s tough.”

Furthermore, he states that perseverance is a quality that he utilizes every day. His comments in regards to this were very powerful He states “you can doubt, and you can come to a wall. But how are going to get over that wall – go over it... through it – however you’re going to do it – just do it – get to the other side.”

Additionally, he carries over organization and preparation from athletics, and applies it to his profession. He compares this to practice while playing college football. He stated that hard practice, physically, was in the spring. During the season, however, it was mostly film break down and the plays that you execute against the opposing team. From this, he recognized that the coaches analyze these situations every day and every play; it is very organized and tedious, therefore that prepared him for his career. For example, Nathan declares:

“I’m very organized... you have to be prepared... don’t come to the classroom at 7:55, school starts at eight, and you’re trying to figure out what you’re going to teach... I always thought that preparation and organization was half the battle. So that’s something I carried over from football.”

Academically, he bases his success on his experiences and knowledge from graduate school. He stated that his foundation, being his master’s degree directly influenced his success in his career. He acknowledges that he is not an expert due to the ever changing nature of education, however, his training in urban education and leadership keeps him “well versed,” as he states, in his community and his school. He states that his knowledge from graduate school has created trust from his superintendent, his colleagues, as well as the parents and guardians of the children in his school. For example, he states:

“There’s times when I’m meeting with a parent and we’re deciding what we’re going to do with their child. It’s going to be a life changing decision. And from the knowledge I learned from grad school, as I’ve grown in my field... you have to take that

knowledge and you have to apply it and you have to make the right decision... the best decision for that child.”

*Case Study #4 (The Record Breaker)*

Jacob Money is an African American male approximately 25 years of age. This participant, unlike the others, was raised in a military family, therefore, he moved around a lot as a child and an adolescent. He finally settled in an area in his early to late teens. His perspective of athletics and academics is far varied from the other participants. Also, it is also important to note that the participant, due to his background and childhood, is apprehensive of relationships in general. This perspective gives this study a different turn, however, his perspective is very useful in order to demonstrate the nature of collegiate athletics and collegiate athletes in many instances.

*Introduction to Jacob Money*

Jacob has a very interesting story. During his interview, he discussed things and situations that were definitely not expected or in the protocol. He was very open and eager to share his story, however. It was nonetheless, surprising to hear his reactions and responses to some of the situations. His perspective throughout the interview and his answers provide this study with a deeper context. Like the previous participants, there are many life experiences that have formed and shaped who has become today.



*“Getting Ready for the Season” (Research Question One)*

**“How do African American male student athletes who participated at PWI’s describe their athletic and academic experiences?”**

As the interview began, we discussed where he was from and where he was born. Jacob was born in Okinawa, Japan. He later moved to South Korea for a short while and he also lived in Germany for the majority of his younger years. After his time in those countries, he later moved to Washington State, San Antonio, Georgia, and later back to San Antonio. After his father retired for a second time, he spent his first full year in school in about the seventh grade. Accordingly, he only spent about six months of his life in Japan. By the time he moved to Germany, he started to become culturally aware of his surroundings. He stated that Germany was far different than his time in Washington State and San Antonio. He stated that he was used to getting acclimated to the different cultures around him by the time he moved to San Antonio for the second time. Therefore, he was comfortable in new environments as he expected that he would not be there for long periods of time.

After we discussed his childhood and the places he had lived and seen, we discussed the educational level of his parents. Jacob stated that he was the first person in his family to attend college. He stated that his mother and father both have a high school education. Through Jacob’s perspective, that does not mean much to him. He stated that his father didn’t have many opportunities because he comes from a small town in Indiana. His father, as the participant notes, is a smart man; however, with him being from a small

town, the military was the primary way out of his situation. His mother, on the other hand, went to college for a year; however, she had his brother, who is seven years older than the participant. Therefore, after she had his brother, she chose to raise a family rather than continue her college education. Also, he notes that because he grew up overseas, his relationship with his extended family was very minimal. Therefore, he was accustomed to the military lifestyle and he was not necessarily connected to any college. Also, before we move into the next portion of the interview, it is necessary to note that he grew up with both of his parents.

Next, we discussed the athletic influence his family has on him. He noted that his father was extremely gifted as an athlete. He notes that his father played many sports including football, basketball, and baseball. He also notes that to this day, he can still shoot free throws with both hands as well as switch hit. Although his father is blessed with supreme athletic ability, his background in a small town in Indiana prevented him from the exposure that he would have liked. He mentioned that he was a starting linebacker for his high school; however, due to his father being African American, this also prevented him from receiving opportunities to attend college as an athlete. For example, he notes:

“This is his story. I’m trying to do my best to summarize it but essentially, because of his skin color and because of that region, he did not receive that type of exposure. He had great stats, but the second string linebacker, a White kid, who I assume did not have more status or stats, ended up getting a scholarship to Purdue... And that kind of puts it all into perspective.”

To expand on his father's story, he mentioned his father's background while living in Indiana. He stated that his father grew up in a single parent household with his mother. He never had much and he was necessarily the man of the house, so there were many things his father had to endure as a child. For his father, sport was another avenue to escape the hardships and trials he was faced with on a daily basis.

Moving to the next phase of the interview process, we discussed how his parents influenced him athletically and academically. Academically, Jacob stated that his academic accomplishments can be credited to his competitive nature. He mentioned that his parents were always supportive; however, he was a very competitive child. He noted that if there was ever something in class that could be measured by a scale or where the best person could be pointed out at any given time, he would always want to be the best person at that given activity, or if someone was better than him, he would want to beat that student. He also stated that in his household academics "was just a given."

He stated that his dad was "pro Black power" and he (his dad) wanted Jacob to excel academically. Expanding on this "Black power" perspective, the participant noted that early on in his life, he never really understood the concept due to being raised on military bases. However, when he went off to college, it was there where he fully understood and became aware of him being African American. He noted that even in his time in San Antonio, he was still surrounded by military families which were Hispanic and White, but when he went to college he could truly recognize his skin color and culture. Furthermore, his "Blackness" was magnified because he was at a PWI. On this particular campus, only 1.9 percent of the student body is African American. He immediately noticed

this. Adding to this, he stated that he was one of few, if not the only African American in the engineering department. Therefore this experience he had of being the only African American was not an enjoyable one; rather he stated that it was more of a burden for him. He also noted that it was added pressure because he felt like he was a representation of the team, the coaches, the family, and others during his time as a student athlete.

Athletically he stated that his parents “guided him with invisible hands.” To expand on this statement, he states:

“Let’s say if I wanted to do soccer, they let me do soccer... if I wanted to play basketball, they’d let me play basketball... but they were never really like ok... you’re going to grow up to be a linebacker or grow up to be a baseline hitter.”

Jacob stated that they wanted him to make his own decisions. They wanted to make him feel empowered as he guided himself through whatever decision he made.

From here we expanded on his competitive nature. He stated that his competitive nature began at an early age. He recalls a story that his mother told him. He stated:

“When I was seven months old, his brother would taunt him... I was crawling... I didn’t have a great sense of awareness at the time or anything like that... but I forced myself to stand up... I pulled the gate open and started walking on my own... from that moment on my mom always said she knew what type of personality I would have.”

Additionally, when he resided in Washington State, he referenced how he had a neighbor who he would play with. However, when he would play with this neighbor, these instances would end in a near brawl because they were so competitive. One would beat

the other and vice versa. He stated he wanted to win at everything. This competitive nature would often lead to altercations; however, he said this was because he hated to lose more than he loved winning. Therefore, this competitive nature began at a young age for Jacob.

We then moved on to how his family and community members (i.e. coaches, teachers, peers, etc.) influenced him athletically and academically. Academically, he stated that he really did not have a big influence. He stated “I wanted to get the best grades possible and anyone could not tell me otherwise.” Continuing these statements, he noted that he was a reserved child; this was due to his constant relocating because of the military lifestyle his family lived. Therefore, establishing friendships and relationships with other people was not a necessity for because he felt like he was going to move soon. That said, one of the easiest things to connect with was literally academics. He mentioned that when the other children at his school would go play, he would read books on the table or in the shade; this type of activity, for Jacob, were comforting for him. He always felt by himself, however, he was not concerned about what others perceived him as or expected him to be. He noted that it was not an issue for him to be motivated to achieve academically. He stated that he graduated twelfth in his class. In regards to this, he specifically stated:

“It could have been higher... which is kind of funny... I didn’t even realize how high I was ranked in the class, and I had a choice between going to the Junior Olympics and competing in the 800 meter run or taking a final for a summer school class I took in high school... I chose to Junior Olympics... I didn’t take the final. But it really messed up my GPA. So I didn’t realize how high I was in the class rankings.”

Jacob really reflected on his competitive nature. After he stated this, he thought about how he wanted to beat the top ranked person in the class academically. That is just who he is.

Athletically, he stated that he never pictured himself as a great athlete during his younger years. He noted that his athletic existence was created when a coach noticed him running on a field at school. He noted that his coach approached him and told him he needed to run track. At the time, Jacob did not realize or know what track was. His coach told him that it was a fairly easy sport; the only thing he had to do was run around in a circle. Jacob also noted that he was not coordinated – at all. After we joked about this, he went on to state that he loved to race. Jacob raced his peers on bikes, he would race people running – that’s what he did as a child and it was something that he confided in. Also, he noted that he had a lot of classmates that were more athletically gifted than he was. He noted that his classmates were much more coordinated than he was as well. He notes:

“I just had peers that really were a lot more athletic than me. I looked up to them because... they could dribble a basketball without hitting themselves... like they were coordinated. I was not as coordinated as them and I envied that. So... I felt like I was empowered... because I was good at track. So it was... it kind of added to that drive... it just matched to what I perceived as superiority.”

Adding to his reflections, he noted that he kept a journal as a younger child. In this journal he remembered in retrospect, that he wanted to be the fastest man in the world. His statements in regards to this are as follows:

“This was back when I ran the 100 meters. I found in retrospect that I wanted to be the fastest 100 meter runner and also in the 200 meters. I wanted to break all

these records. Like have gold medals. I was totally immersed in the potential that I was perceived to have.”

This journal was kept while he was in middle school. By the time Jacob entered high school, he was definitely the top athlete at his skill. He noted that he was the first person in the history of his high school to make varsity as a freshman. He specifically stated that he “held it down.” In light of this, he noted that he was very distant to his competition because he knew that he was good. The one thing that he noticed about his competition, however, was that they were more developed and bigger than he was. For instance, he recalled a time when he raced against Robert Griffin, III. His comments on this experience are as follows:

“RG3 was huge! He was massive... I mean at 15, it just didn’t make any sense how big he was... how much bigger he was than me... I guess it does now since he’s a pro... but I was just stunned... on paper, I knew I could beat him, but I just felt like I was this nerdy kid... that’s who I was and it was cool. I was just this nerdy kid from South Central Texas who is now competing against some very complex athletic people like RG3 and so I knew I was good but it was a very distant sort of mentality.”

After his comments on racing great athletic talents, he noted that he was the fastest 100 meter runner, 200 meter runner, 400 meter runner, 800 meter runner, mile runner, and three mile runner. Also, Jacob then stated that as he became older, he was exposed to other sports. In addition to track, he did soccer and kickboxing. These sports gave Jacob a different perspective because outside of skill, these sports were very technical based. He

appreciates these sports because they made him realize how much technique helped him in track. Therefore, competing in these sports helped him work harder in track. He realized that if he worked hard, he could compete at a big time college, he could run on television, and get exposed because of his hard work. This moment in time is when the participant realized how his athletic career could formalize.

As we discussed the athletic and academic accomplishments of Jacob prior to college, he was very modest about what he accomplished. He stated that he did not have many athletic accomplishments. However, when he reflected on this, he mentioned that he was an athlete who left track meets with four or five medals. These medals were usually gold and silver. Nationally, Jacob competed in the Junior Olympics four times, he represented the state of Texas in the Southwestern meet (a track meet which includes Texas, Arizona, California, and Florida. He was also invited to the New Balance meet in New York, which he did not compete in. Academically, he was an African American scholar, he was one of twenty students invited to be a Texas High School Aerospace Scholar, he graduated twelfth in his class, and he had the most scholarship money than anyone in his class. The participant really took pride in his academics.

*“This is Why We Work So Hard” (Research Question Two)*

**“How does participation in collegiate sport influence educational experiences of African American male student athletes?”**

Next, we discussed how he chose to attend the university he represented as a student athlete. He discussed his recruiting visits to some of the top schools. His mother



wanted him to apply for scholarships because his family could not afford to pay for college. He noted that on many of his visits, he recalls that they gave him the “red carpet” treatment and they surrounded him with parties and things of that nature. However, he was not interested in this. He noted that when he went to the university he chose to represent as a student athlete, his treatment here was exactly what he preferred. He stated:

“My host was very reserved. He was like I’m all about books, I’m all about athletics, I’m all about grades... I really appreciated that. He asked me if I wanted to do anything, and I told him no. I went back to my hotel, I went to sleep, and I had a great night. It was such an easy decision.”

Accordingly, he got a full academic scholarship to this university. Prior to stepping foot on this campus, he thought about giving up track. However, the head at the time, approached him and persuaded him to become a member of the team.

Once he joined the team, he stated that track was everything to him. He stated that he “thought about it day and night. I was going to be the next best thing.” This mind frame however, made him over think and Jacob noted that he was over committed to the sport. He specifically stated that it made him become “hollow inside.” Expanding on this statement, he goes into how his experiences on the team made him feel. He mentioned that he was not the only African American on the team; however, he was the only African American from a military background. He was the only African American on the team that grew up with a mother and father. Also, he mentioned that all of the coaches were White. He mentioned that he spoke differently than all of the other student athletes on the team. These social dynamics made it difficult for him to fit in; the participant was not

readily accepted to the team. He compares this social dynamic to that of when he moved to Georgia. He states:

“I move to Georgia. I make this traumatic move where I move from San Antonio, a place where I’m really happy and feel like we’re going to buy the house and I’m going to grow up in this community. Then we move to Georgia... when I get to Georgia, the first thing I’m told by the kids is that I speak like a White boy... I had issues with the vernacular, the accent, the southern drawl... I felt like an outcast... I felt this same dynamic and experience in college.”

As we discussed his social experiences related to being an athlete, he made statements of how he initially had to deal with these new variables when he went to college. Every student, especially student athletes deals with them differently. He expressed that often times, he felt like he was in a place of his own. Jacob even expressed times of quitting. He felt like he was not in a place that was positive or beneficial to his growth. When he felt this, he reflected on the time he talked to the coach about his situation. This coach reassured him that he was not the first person to feel this way. This specific coach provided the participant with example of former great athletes who had experienced the same feelings, however, these athletes went on to become some of the greatest athletes known today.

This meeting with his coach enlightened the participant and after this, he began working harder at his craft. He stated that “track became a part of me. It was the number one thing. It was the number one thing until I graduated with my bachelor’s degree.” Because of this stellar recommitment to track, he noted that his grades slacked off. Jacob

stated that he was not willing to balance the student athlete role because of his commitment to his sport. He notes:

“I was so committed to getting ice baths after a workout... getting the right amounts of sleep, getting the right amount of food, talking to my nutritionist. I would do two-a-days without the consent of my coaches... I’d go in the gym in the mornings... I would do cardio... weights... all on my own because it was a part of me... I needed to do this... it became the focal point of my college career from when I was about 21... my junior and senior year.”

From here, we discussed his relationships with his coaches. Jacob had a view of his coaches in a different light than the other participants. He noted that his relationship with his coaches was not based on trust in the slightest bit. At this point of the interview, I was intrigued to find this out because he was the number one athlete in the world, however, he had a difficult relationship with his coaches. However, as the interview progressed I understood why this relationship was turbulent. He stated that his scholarship went down 15 percent as a freshman, five percent the next year, and the next, and the next. However, he was the fastest person on the team. And he fared well academically. He did state however, he picked and chose the events he would excel in because he was so good in the 800. This is the event Jacob was ranked number one in the world. Another experience he had with his coaches is when he and about four other athletes competed for a conference championship. He noted “we failed miserably.” This then led to his coach telling him and his teammates, through text message, about their poor performance. At

this point in the interview, he expanded on this conversation. It is also essential to note that Jacob still has this text message saved in his phone. He noted:

“He said we embarrassed our families, we embarrassed our school on how we performed. He goes on to say that he wasn’t our coach anymore. He... just went on this tirade on this text message and there was nothing positive about it.”

Therefore, it is safe to note that his coach was unhappy with the outcome of Jacob and the performance of other student athletes. This established a distant relationship between him and his coaches. Academically, Jacob established great relationships with his classmates in which he still appreciates today. He noted that there would be some moments where he would help them and vice versa. Therefore, academically, the relationships developed in his department were the biggest influence and supporter for him, rather than his coaches.

Also, Jacob wrote goals for himself. He accomplished all of his goals that he made and more. He became an All-American twice, an Academic All-American once, and he ran under his goal of a certain time in his final race. These accomplishments made his career “worth it” as he specifically states. He also stated that he had phenomenal races.

After we talked about some of his athletic accomplishments in college, we then talked about how he had to work while he was an athlete for a few years. He noted that he lost approximately 15% of his scholarship because he did not perform as well as he would have liked. This prompted him to get a job. This job made him feel reassured as a man because he put the responsibility on himself to make up for the money he owed because he lost his scholarship. Rather than leaning on his parents, he chose to work. He specifically noted “I was proud that I had a chance to weather the storm.”

This then moved us into his work ethic as a student athlete. He noted how when he would be monitored by the coaching staff, he did not see the results that he wanted. However, when he stated doing workouts on his own, he began to see better results faster. He specifically states:

“I’d go and have my own private sessions. Do my jump rope, do my power cleans... the coaches coached me in the afternoon but not in the mornings... I had a lot of freedom and flexibility to do what I wanted to do. As soon as I started doing this... at two points in my career... I was number one in the world... and I directly attribute that to those two a day sessions.”

He noted that this work ethic made him detour away from his academics. He noted that because he was so consumed, his body would be so physically tired, that his grades dropped from a 3.3 down to a 2.9 GPA. His statement in this regard does indeed enlighten people on the rigorous schedule of a student athlete on a daily basis. He notes:

“I’d wake up at 5:30AM, put in four hours at the lab, went to class, took a quiz, got lunch, and went to practice. Sat in the ice bath, read a book, got treatment, and then I’m going home. That was my day... a normal day.”

He did note however, when his grades dropped slightly, he received help from his professors. He sought help from his professors because he did not want to fail any class. He did not fail any classes while he was a student athlete. He told his professors that he really cares about academics and through this; he was able to maintain his eligibility for track. He noted that he had a conversation with his professor and Jacob told the professor that he had been in three hotels in seven days. He knew he was going to fail the test,

however, he had the added pressure of needing to win his race, or otherwise he would go home. He noted that he ran the best race of his life at the time; however, he could not well on his tests due to his athletic requirements. Also, he noted that because his grades dropped, he worked harder to maintain his eligibility. He recounted a time when he stayed up for 36 hours just to pass a final for a class in order to get a final grade of a C.

*“Defining Your Legacy” (Research Question Three)*

**“How do African American male student athletes describe the experiences that influenced them to persist through graduate school?”**

This is initially how he knew graduate school would work for him. After he reflected on this, he then went into the moment he found out he was accepted to graduate school. As Jacob told the story, he did not seem disappointed; he just took that situation for what it was worth. In summation, he told the story of how his coach initially said he would pay for his fifth year of eligibility, which would be in graduate school. However, as he remembers, he waited on his aid to come, however, the aid never showed up in his student account. Basically, the coach never honored his word on paying for his school. He stated that for whatever reason, the coach did not feel that it was a priority to pay for his school. He stated “I guess it was just business.” This reflection led him to talk more on the relationship he had with his coaches. He stated that when he initially was accepted into graduate school, he was at a track meet. However, at this track meet he ran a terrible race. He was slated to win the race, he was ranked as the number one runner in the nation at his event, however, he just did not run a good race. That same day, after the race, he then

checked his email and he was accepted into graduate school. At this moment, he stated that a bleak and horrifying moment turned into a peaceful and calm moment. He specifically stated “I was confirmed of my future.” But this peaceful moment, then turned bad again, because his coach then found out about him being accepted into graduate school. His coach, for lack of a better phrase, “ripped” him for his performance and blamed his performance on his acceptance into graduate school. Accordingly, the reason why he had a bad race is because he had iron deficiency. He could not perform as well as expected because he was physically incapable of performing at a high level. This moment seemed tough for him. He then went into how he appreciated everything that happened to him as a student athlete, but there were times when he contemplated if being a student athlete was worth it.

After we discussed this, we then went into how graduate school became an option for him. He presented me with a couple of situations. He stated that his major was civil engineering. In this major, one has to have a basic understanding of what he or she is doing. However, Jacob noted that although his GPA was high, he did not have a basic understanding of the concepts of civil engineering. He stated:

“If I were to apply for jobs, all I could tell them on paper was that I could run really fast. I couldn’t really tell them anything about civil engineering specifically. It’s generally expected in civil engineering... that you have internships... but because of my track schedule, it was such a conflict to try to get me to work in the middle of June. My internships would start late-May at the latest, but I’d have to wait four more weeks... until I could commit.”

Through this issue, he then developed a relationship with a certain professor who advised him on entering graduate school. He advised him to do this because Jacob did not have the basic skills needed in order to be successful with his major. Therefore, he looked into two schools that specifically who help him out with his specific interests. He also stated that graduate school helped him figure out what he wanted to be in life. He noted:

“I had some classes, I could do some equations, I could memorize some crap but I knew nothing about it. Um, if I was stuck in something my whole life and I’m miserable then I’m screwed... I need something that could give me the flexibility to focus on something... focus on civil engineering... or I could do some lobbying or working in the political sector as some public official... I didn’t really have a game plan... but graduate school equipped me for that.”

Jacob specifically states:

“I’ve grown to appreciate the things that I have accomplished. I have seven records to my name. So I had a great career. I did things that I never thought I would do. And... from those low moments I had throughout my career, I got redemption in numerous ways. I knew it was worth it from the standpoint of I got everything I could out of it. But there is a cost to everything... today I have trust issues... I don’t feel like people have my best interest... I’m still trying to cope with that.”

He does end this interview on a high note. He stated that there was nothing harder. His specific comment was:

“I raced in front of thousands – a hundred thousand people. I’ve raced against Olympians. I’ve raced on television. And there’s nothing more exhilarating than



that adrenaline rush. Not mentally exhilarating, but there's nothing more fearful like the fear that you feel before you're about to race... you're just completely desensitized from all other types of challenges... I've been to the mountain top."

He has experienced some of the hardest things he could up to this point in his life. He stated that studying for a test or reading a book is easy for him because he did these things in juggling the life of a student athlete. Secondly, he has learned to accept criticism. He has learned to accept constructive criticism. Jacob noted that when he was younger, he would take constructive criticism personally. However, when got older, he began to see how it benefitted him. He stated:

"I benefit from them, they benefit from me. When I started to recognize that contrast, I just took the orders. You want me to do a three hundred even though it's not on the schedule? I'll do that. You want me to do more push-ups... more abs... even though that's not on the schedule, I'll do that."

When he made this adjustment, this is when he stopped going against the grain when he would receive criticism. He just accepted it and did the work. He wanted the glory. He wanted to win. He wanted to be the best he could be. He also stated that there is worth in collaboration. He stated that this definitely translated into his time in graduate school. He noted that the professors would notice that he had "harder skin" than the other students because he was a part of athletics. Through this, through what he has been faced with, he has learned how to deal with adversity and how to grow when things do not go his way.

As we ended the interview, he said that a very important part of him was created because he saw his father work in a physical profession. Outside of the military, his father

worked as a mechanic. He stated that “My father didn’t go to work in a suit and tie. My father went to work in overalls.” The labor aspect of life makes sense to him. Spending life in a cubicle, does not make sense to him. Jacob noted that his father wanted to be the best mechanic, therefore wanting to be the best student athlete is what worked for him. He stated:

“His work ethic definitely translated in that... that’s what he wanted to do... he wanted to be the best mechanic... being around that sort of example always motivated me to become the best I could be... but while I was motivated through competition, it can be credited to my father as well.”

### *Analysis of Findings*

The analysis of data and the presentation of the findings are a huge endeavor for any researcher who hopes to make certain that the reader understands and makes sense of the data. The purpose of this study was to examine and interpret African American male student athletes at PWI’s, and motivational factors that influence their persistence to and through graduate school. This section includes a more in depth analysis to create new understandings and insights. The data includes four interviews. These interviews produced 64 pages of transcripts and 30 data units. All data units have been sorted into themes and sub-themes. A list of all themes for the data analysis was created as well.

During the process of this study, the lives of the participants began to take form. Although these former African American student athletes have totally different backgrounds and life experiences, they are indeed very similar. All of the participants are well recognized athletically throughout their entire lives; these individuals were the best

representatives of their respective sports not only in their home communities and K-12 careers, but collegiately as well. Furthermore, the participants are well decorated academically; having garnered some of the best academic accolades that students as well as student athletes can receive. While these participants expressed their stories, experiences, as well as current situations, several themes emerged to illuminate the motivational factors that have led them to and through graduate school.

When looking at motivation, this term is divided into two categories– (a) intrinsic motivation and (b) extrinsic motivation. Within these categories, several major themes emerged. Intrinsic motivation was supported with (a) high academic expectations and (b) high athletic expectations. Strong work ethic emerged as a third major theme, with discipline and competitiveness as sub-themes. Under the category of extrinsic motivation three major themes emerged. Family influence, community influence/tradition, and social influence. Under social influence, teamwork and the code switching emerged as sub-themes respectively. Table 4.1 displays the themes and subthemes.

<b>Intrinsic Motivation</b>	<b>Extrinsic Motivation</b>
High Academic Expectations (Know Your Assignment)	Family Influence (Family over Everything)
High Athletic Expectations (Being the G.O.A.T.)	Community Influence/Tradition (Expect Greatness)
Strong Work Ethic (Hard Work and Dedication)	Social Influence (Be Mindful of the Company You Keep)
Discipline (Sub Theme) (Read Your Keys)	Teamwork (Sub Theme) (There is no I in Team)
Competitiveness (Sub Theme) (Win at all Costs)	Code Switching (Sub Theme) (Knowing how to play the game)

Table 4.1 (Data Analysis)

*“Know Your Assignment” (High Academic Expectations)*

Academic expectations emerged as a theme for intrinsic motivation. Academically, the participants were well honored respectively. All of the participants received academic honors throughout their K-12 and collegiate careers. All of the participants accomplished great academic achievements; these achievements consisted of A/B Honor Roll, National Honor Society, Academic All-American, and top performers at UIL competitions. Therefore this supports the fact that although student athletes are recruited at the university level purely based on their athletic talents, their academic ability and commitment may be more variable depending on their academic ability, history of academic success and failures, and the influences of family (Simons, Rheenene, & Covington, 1999). Nathan was successful academically; however this success was along the lines of his K-12 career.

Although the participants in this study had incredible access to academic services offered by their athletic program, only two participants actively discussed their relationship with academic personnel. All of the participants in this study were academically successful, therefore assistance from academic personnel was limited to the participants while they were student athletes. All of the participants were set on attending graduate school. Their reasoning may have been different, however, all of the participants had a plan to attend graduate school. Winslow made several statements in regards to this. Early in the interview process, he made statements about his involvement in “Teen Court.” His involvement in this activity prompted the process of being a lawyer. Additionally,

although he was recruited for football, he knew that his backup plan for a career (outside of the NFL) was to be a lawyer. He discussed with his academic counselor on a recruiting visit that he wanted to major in “pre-law.” His academic advisor then advised him, due to pre-law not being an offered major, to major in either English or political science. Winslow then chose to major in English. This supports the notion that he had a plan to attend graduate prior to attending college.

Norris has a different story in this regard. Norris noted that he graduated early (his junior year) and received his bachelor’s degree. With another year of eligibility left, he had the choice of double majoring or getting a master’s degree. The participant then decided that the best option for him would be to get a master’s degree. His statements in regards to this are as follows:

“So once that decision was made – ok I’m done with my math degree... do I want to double major or get a graduate degree... it was a no brainer for me... once you get out with a graduate degree, especially in physics... if you’re going to a tech related field... that looks way better than a double major... so that’s really why I went for a graduate degree. It was better than a double major.”

Once this decision was made, he then started to shift his focus more from athletics to academics. This does not necessarily conclude that his entire focus left from football. This simply means that he had to change his ways of thinking in order to be successful in the dual pursuit of being a student athlete.

Nathan’s decision to attend graduate school was different than any other participant in the study. Unlike the first participant, he did not initially know that he

wanted to attend graduate school. Also, unlike the Norris, he did not graduate early from college with his bachelor's degree. Nathan, instead, made his decision when he was back home contemplating on his future career. He then decided that the best option for him, in order to maximize his intellectual ability, would be to go to graduate school. He applied to the school for which he a student athlete, as well as an HBCU. As noted in the interview process, he entertained the decision to become a teacher, however, this career was not best suited for him; it wasn't his passion. He then analyzed his qualities; these qualities were in deed analyzing, decision making, and implementing systems.

Jacob's decision to attend graduate school was in part like Nathan. He acknowledged the fact that he did not have any direction on where he would go in life. Adding to this, he did not have any skills did not know the context of his major which was civil engineering. Accordingly, he sought advice from a professor and he guided him toward graduate school. Therefore, after seeking advice and knowing his strengths and weaknesses, he then made it a point to attend graduate school. His comments were:

“I had some classes, I could do some equations, I could memorize come crap but I knew nothing about it. Um, if I was stuck in something my whole life and I'm miserable then I'm screwed... I need something that could give me the flexibility to focus on something... focus on civil engineering... or I could do some lobbying or working in the political sector as some public official... I didn't really have a game plan... but graduate school equipped me for that.”

*“Being the G.O.A.T.” (High Athletic Expectations)*

Athletic expectations is a theme of intrinsic motivation. All of the participants expressed they all started participating in their respective sports at a young age. They also noted that athletic participation was an activity that began as fun for them. When looking at athletic expectations, the participants were not surprisingly confident to succeed athletically because of their commitment and desire to compete collegiately. All of the former athletes in this study stated that they knew, or at least had the desire to compete collegiately. For example, all of the participants knew, because of their athletic accomplishments, they had the ability to play at the next level. As mentioned earlier, the former student athletes have garnered some of the best athletic accomplishments one could receive prior to attending college. Therefore, intrinsically, they possessed confidence and assurance that they would be successful in this endeavor.

Furthermore, data for this study supported the notion that most student athletes are highly motivated to succeed in the athletic domain, having been selected to participate in intercollegiate athletics because of their proven ability and desire to succeed (Simons, Rheenen, & Covington, 1999). All of the participants in this study expressed that they were highly recognized athletically in their respective sports.

Accordingly, many reasons for this commitment and desire to participate collegiately surfaced. First and foremost, all participants knew that their abilities would allow them to play at this level. For example, Nathan stated that he always knew he was good enough to play collegiately. This statement supports this notion. Secondly, the

football players in this study wanted to attend college; K-12 was not the last opportunity for school in their situations. They had the desire, albeit due to athletics, to attend college.

The participants believed they would play sports collegiately. All of the participants were confident in their ability to play after their K-12 careers. Therefore these statements support Simons, Rheenen, & Covington's (1999) conclusion that many student athletes, especially scholarship athletes at Division I schools, are recruited to universities primarily because of their athletic talent. Furthermore, this athletic ability has been praised and rewarded by parents, coaches, and peers over time; which can date back to elementary school (Simons, Rheenen, & Covington, 1999). In the experiences presented in this study, the recruiting process was centered on athletic talent, school size and exposure, and social quality of life.

Although this is evident in the interviews, only two out of the four participants expressed a strong desire to compete professionally. That said, none of the participants competed professionally. Winslow attempted to play professionally. He states:

“You can trust me. I wanted it more than anybody that you could imagine. I would have played in the NFL for \$60 thousand... \$50 thousand a year. I would've still wanted to play. I love the game of football. So... law school never got in the way of that dream... I was always prayerful about the pursuit of that career... I understood that if God had it for me... I would be in the NFL. Which is why I never got caught up like, oh I have to go to a big school to go to the NFL.”

Norris shifted his focus towards academics during the end of his career, while Nathan did not pursue this. Nathan states:



“I don’t think I was ever one of those kids like, yeah my dream was to go to the NFL... win Super Bowls, or things like that... I had that sense of how difficult it was... but I did make it a goal to go to college... I wanted a scholarship.”

Accordingly, all of the participants made graduate school a primary goal.

*“Hard Work and Dedication” (Strong Work Ethic)*

Work ethic emerged as a major theme for intrinsic motivation. The participants all expressed values of a strong work ethic. These former student athletes acknowledged that work ethic influenced their success. For instance, Winslow noted that he made it a point that no one would out work him athletically. The following statement supports this:

“That was really my thing... I’m going to out work you and I just had confidence that you weren’t going to outwork me. You weren’t better than me. I don’t care how big you were or how fast you thought you were... no matter what... if given the same number of opportunities or even given slightly less I was going to make the best of my chances and that’s literally how I became a starter.”

Norris, due to his size and position, makes continuous recounts of his work ethic and how he maintained an edge on his competition. Nathan noted that his work ethic in regards to studying his opponent, contributed to his athletic success as well:

“I looked at everything... I looked at where you lined up... I looked at tendencies... what plays they run out of certain formations... so once you learn the game... it makes you a like a step quicker than everybody because you know

what's going to happen 90% of the time... the other 10% you might get burnt but... I was usually right.”

Although all of the participants garnered athletic accomplishments in their conference as well as the nation in their respective sports, they knew that athletically and physically, were not the most gifted. However, their maniacal drive and work ethic was a motivating force to keep them at the top of their game. Jacob demonstrates an extreme work ethic. He was highly motivated to succeed athletically. He attributed much of his success to working hard and committing to his sport. For instance, he notes:

“I was so committed to getting ice baths after a workout... getting the right amounts of sleep, getting the right amount of food, talking to my nutritionist. I would do two-a-days without the consent of my coaches... I'd go in the gym in the mornings... I would do cardio... weights... all on my own because it was a part of me... I needed to do this... it became the focal point of my college career from when I was about 21... my junior and senior year.”

He also noted:

“I'd go and have my own private sessions. Do my jump rope, do my power cleans... the coaches coached me in the afternoon but not in the mornings... I had a lot of freedom and flexibility to do what I wanted to do. As soon as I started doing this... at two points in my career... I was number one in the world... and I directly attribute that to those two a day sessions.”

After these statements were made, he stated that this work ethic was directly transferred to his time as a graduate student and his motivation to succeed. Also he noted that his work

ethic comes from his father as well. His father was a hard worker, therefore he wanted to mimic his father and how hard he worked.

*“Read Your Keys” (Discipline)*

Discipline is a sub-theme of high work ethic. Discipline was an intrinsic form of motivation. Norris captures the essence of this theme. During the course of his interview, he made constant references about discipline. Norris has learned the process of being disciplined in his studies; however, once he transferred universities, this discipline was instilled in him therefore he was able to continue his academic success. A major quote by Norris captures this:

“When I was in military school, I had the schedule every day from 6 AM to 7 AM... that was study time. And then from 6 PM to 10 PM was study time. So that’s five hours every day. So I kind of just told myself... I can study half that time and still be above the rest... so after football... I went and studied from 7 to 10 everyday... No matter if it was a test... if it was homework... I just found something to do from 7 to 10... I just wanted to keep that trend going while it was already instilled in me.”

*“Win at All Costs” (Competitiveness)*

Competitiveness is a sub-theme of high work ethic as well. All of the participants expressed that they were highly competitive people. Although all there were several

instances where discussions of competition arose, Winslow made the best statement in regards to this:

“I’m a competitor... That’s just how I live life... I don’t care what it is, I’m going to always strive to be number one... I say... you can judge a competitor by what they do before and after a game. Everybody competes during a game, but... if you really want to know how much of a competitor he is, go... watch him at practice... no... watch him during summer workouts... then you know who really is a competitor... so for me, I did not want to sit on the bench... so I made sure I worked my butt off... I made sure I was not going to be outworked... I also made sure I knew my assignments... all of the defense... so I had confidence that I was going to be better than you.”

Although Norris and Nathan made valiant statements in regards to professional lives, the statements from Winslow and Jacob captured their athletic and academic pursuits. They made several statements in regards to competition throughout their interviews. During their interviews, they spoke on how competition was a major benefactor in their success. Jacob showed many signs of competition throughout his interview. He noted that his competitive nature led him to want to achieve both athletically and academically. Although he stated that academically he wanted to succeed at all costs, his athletic commitment and motivation was accessed through competition. This competitive nature started at a young age. For example, in chapter four, he quotes:

“When I was seven months old, his brother would taunt him... I was crawling... I didn’t have a great sense of awareness at the time or anything like that... but I

forced myself to stand up... I pulled the gate open and started walking on my own... from that moment on my mom always said she knew what type of personality I would have.”

*“Family Over Everything” (Family Influence)*

Family influence was a major theme that supported extrinsic motivation. All of the participants noted that their families, although very supportive of their athletic endeavors, made it clear that they would not tolerate academic failure. Winslow noted that his mother made sure academics was first. Norris notes that he grew up in the “spoil the child, spare the rod” era. Nathan noted that his grandmother did not allow him to miss school. Also, all of the participants were the first people in their immediate family to go to college. Therefore a major part of their academic success was initiated by their family members.

The participants also expressed that they did not want their parents (or grandparents in the situation for Nathan) to have to fund their college expenses. They all expressed that their families either could not afford to pay for college, or even if they could, they did not want the financial burden of college to be placed on their families. Winslow jokingly stated that his mother told him “you better get you a scholarship!” The statements by Winslow and Norris fairly coincided with one another; Winslow initially wanted to get a scholarship either academically or athletically, while Norris asserted that his parents would be supportive either route he took. Nathan noted it was more of an athletic accomplishment to receive a scholarship. Also, Jacob noted that his mother wanted him to look for scholarships because his family could not afford college tuition.

*“Expect Greatness” (Community Influence/Tradition)*

Community Influence/Tradition supports extrinsic motivation. Winslow and Nathan made excellent comments in this regard. They were part of great K-12 athletic programs, which in turn, created the drive to excel academically. Winslow and Nathan expressed that they came from a program that expected greatness. Winslow noted that his program was dubbed “The City of Champions.” Nathan, however, stated this best:

“We were held to a higher expectation than most... they expected more from us. We were put on a pedestal... so anytime we did anything – positive or negative – there was an awareness to it... they expected a lot from us because of the tradition of the district and the school... we were supposed to do right... we were supposed to be successful... on the field and in the class.”

Norris noted, he began playing football for fun, and it continued throughout. All of the participants began sports at an early age. They expressed that they wanted to play; they wanted to be part of their community. For example, summing Norris’s statement in regards to this, he stated that he wanted to fit in with his peers. His peers were involved in sports as well as being gifted athletically. Therefore, he found it in himself to participate and become a good athlete. His statement in regards to this is as follows:

“That’s what it was there. I’m a product of my environment. There wasn’t... a conscience decision to you know... I’m going to do the best I can on this test to be smart... I’m going to go out on the field and do the best I can do... to smack this

dude on the next play. You just... the people around you are good... so I wanted to be good.”

Norris although his community was superior to those in the surrounding area, he did not express the same level of “tradition” for his high school. Rather, his academic success was due to him wanting to fit in. So therefore, initially, Norris found his success in his peers; his peers were successful, therefore he in turn was successful. Norris expressed that he was surrounded by the best talent in the area. This expectation guided them to succeed academically and athletically. Specifically, these individuals wanted to carry the torch; they wanted to be the sole reason that they led their programs to victory. Therefore, the legacy that was created before them, was a driving force in continuing their athletic motivation in K-12.

*“Be Mindful of the Company You Keep” (Social Influence)*

Social influences were a form of extrinsic motivation. Winslow had expressed his social experiences; however, they were not like the other participants. Socially, he reflected that he was one of the few African Americans in his cohort, maybe even his school, as he stated. Winslow noted that as an athlete he was surrounded by people of color. However, in law school, being surrounded by a majority of White students, he did not want to be marginalized by any stereotype. Therefore, he made it a point to be punctual and perform well academically; he did not want to be perceived as a “jock.” He also noted that getting called on in class was a big fear of his. However, this fear created the positive relationship between him and his professor. The participant felt comfortable enough to

approach the professor and let her know that this was a challenge. For Winslow, this helped him feel supported during his time in graduate school.

Furthermore, statements from the participants support Milner's (2004) notion that African American graduate students feel undervalued and Aronson & Salinas (1998), Aronson & Steele et al. (1999), and Steele & Aronson's (1995) statement that African American graduate students work to overcome negative racial stereotypes. Winslow's statements were magnified as well, due to his background as a student athlete. Therefore, Winslow made it a point to succeed in graduate school due to him wanting to prove the people that did not believe in him right. Also, he noted that there was a professor that had a personal vendetta on him. This experience made participant #1 push that much harder in order to succeed as well.

Socially, Norris, once he realized he would make the transition into graduate school, he then became immersed in a different group of people. He began to socialize with his graduate classmates more in order to become more successful as a graduate student. He specifically notes in the interview process that in his department (physics) there are many assignments and homework; therefore there was a lot of studying to take place. Being around this group of students would allow him to focus on his academics more. Nathan noted that his involvement with a fraternity assisted him in pursuing a graduate degree. His comments in regards to this are as follows:

“I looked at how they did things... I focused more in the classroom... so I can set myself up to go to grad school if I want to go to grad school or go to law school if



I want to go to law school. So I think after Kappa... my GPA went up because I focused more.”

Although the other participants were not involved in fraternities, Nathan credits much of his academic success to being involved in the fraternity. He noted that Kappa opened his mind as well as expanded the business side of him.

Jacob also had beneficial social experiences during his time as a graduate student; these experiences came through his peers (in graduate school), not his coaches or athletic counterparts. As an undergraduate, his social experiences were very negative. For instance, he notes:

“I move to Georgia. I make this traumatic move where I move from San Antonio, a place where I’m really happy and feel like we’re going to buy the house and I’m going to grow up in this community. Then we move to Georgia... when I get to Georgia, the first thing I’m told by the kids is that I speak like a White boy... I had issues with the vernacular, the accent, the southern drawl... I felt like an outcast... I felt this same dynamic and experience in college.”

Moving back to his beneficial social experiences, he noted that his graduate classmates often would help him and vice versa. He also noted that because he was a student athlete, he could endure more from the professors because he had “thicker skin” as he noted. Also, Jacob had many negative experiences during his time as a student athlete. These negatives were however, turned into positives. He noted that he learned how to accept criticism and deal with adversity.

*“There is no ‘I’ in Team” (Teamwork)*

Teamwork was a sub-theme of social influences. This theme was an extrinsic motivator. Also, teamwork was transferred from athletics, through graduate school, and then on to their professional career. Norris makes several statements about teamwork. His statements came in the form of how they transferred over to his professional career. He states:

“If you don’t go play sports in college, you just kind of go to school. You do your work, you make sure you’re getting the best grade... and you do this by yourself, with no help from anybody... you do this... for four years. So then when you go in the workforce and you have to depend on other people... you don’t have any concept of... I do the best I can do, but also, make sure that I’m helping out my team, so the team looks better.”

Furthermore, Nathan notes his success in graduate school because of class participation. He noted in the interview that going to class as a student athlete was a struggle for him. However, once he attended graduate school, he was forced to attend class and participate. Here are his comments:

“I had to read and I had to participate in class... I never was really a big talker before I got to grad school... you have to be present... so that’s when I found out I could actually talk... and use my words being in grad school because it forced it out of you. We had to do that in class.”

*“Knowing How to Play the Game” (Code Switching)*

Code switching in various social contexts is a sub- theme that surfaced as well for social influences. This theme was not primarily a motivating factor that influenced the student athletes to attend graduate school; however, it is a quality that helped them persist through graduate school. All of the participants expressed that a major part of their success came from interacting with different people and in different settings. This in turn created the trait of being relatable. Winslow credits the attribute of being able to relate from being an athlete, being a good student, as well as working with children and clients from various backgrounds. For instance, Winslow expresses his views on being relatable:

“Me being an effective counsel... an effective attorney is more than just knowing the law, when you’re dealing with kids... getting kids out of trouble doesn’t help them in the long run... but can you keep a kid out of trouble – can you say something to keep him out of trouble – and that’s where I was one of his best students... I could relate to the kids.”

Winslow goes on to state:

“He senses the real person in me and I can relate to him... I can speak his language. On the flipside of that, once I get into the courtroom... I can make the transition... I can now speak their language. So that ability... has allowed me to be successful in my life and my profession. And that is one of the traits that people in this profession would kill for... if you don’t know how to relate... you can only do one type of representation... likewise if you only know how to talk the street, you can’t

go into these companies and try to get their... business... they will be like... you don't carry yourself like the corporate attorney we'd like for you to be... you have to know how to make those transitions.”

Norris expressed his views on being able to relate as well. Norris credits this to his upbringing; athletically he was surrounded by African Americans; his neighborhood was primarily African American; however, his classes, as well as his best friend's family were White. He states:

“Man, going all the way back to elementary school... I was able to be... like a chameleon socially.... Hang out with this group of people... hang out with that group of people and still be relevant... another part of that is race. My neighborhood was... predominately Black... my football teams growing up were Black. But... since I was always in gifted and talented classes, 90% of those classes were White... One of my best friends... his parents were White... I was able to be exposed to different cultures so I wasn't in shock once I went to college.... So I think that played a huge part in my upbringing socially.”

Additionally, Winslow and Norris had similar references to their family background and how they were able to acquire the skill of being able to relate. Winslow expressed that his mother used practical approaches to assist him in public speaking. Also, his notes that his parents are from an underprivileged background, however, publically, one could not readily spot this. However, in private they were able to show their “real” personalities. Norris also noted that although he himself in from an underprivileged background, people do not consider him a “hood” person. His comments are as follows:

“I think I’m a person that can relate to everybody... I was able to... stay cool with everybody... I grew up in the hood but I don’t consider myself a hood person... But I grew up in that environment, so I’m not like a total square... even if I am a square... I still give off vibes... that hood life or whatever you want to call it... but I never really felt like an outcast no matter what group I went into... I was able to be cool with guys that were nerds... I didn’t party much but when I did, they were with guys on the football team and they knew how... I am on the field.”

### *Summary*

This chapter has presented the participants as well as their stories in a manner to address the research questions of this study. The expressions from the interviews were organized into themes and organized in this chapter as well. The themes presented in this study represented reflected both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. For intrinsic motivation, the themes the major themes that emerged were high academic expectations, high athletic expectations, and a strong work ethic. Strong work ethic had two sub-themes; these sub-themes were discipline and competitiveness. Extrinsic motivation produced three major themes. These themes were family influence, community influence/tradition, and social influence. For the theme of social influence, teamwork and the ability to relate emerged as sub-themes. All of the themes presented in this chapter addressed the research questions as well.

## CHAPTER V

### SUMMARY, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### *Introduction*

From here, a review of where I began this study as well as how it evolved is necessary. Given the principles of the naturalistic paradigm, I elected to conduct a qualitative research study in order to examine and (re)interpret the life experiences and motivational factors of four former African American male student athletes who attended PWI's (for athletics) and who have received graduate degrees. More specifically, through naturalistic inquiry, the purpose of this study was to determine the constructed meanings of their personal experiences academically, athletically, and through graduate school. Knowing that each participant had multiple realities, I selected qualitative methodology in an effort to understand the meaning and interpretations of their experiences. Also, it is also safe to note that the researcher and the participant could possibly influence each other.

In an attempt to understand the life experiences and motivational factors that have led these former student athletes through graduate school, I began with these research questions to guide this study:

1. How do African American male student athletes who participated at PWI's describe their athletic and academic experiences?
2. How does participation in collegiate sport influence the academic experiences of African American male student athletes?
3. How do African American male student athletes describe the experiences that influenced them to persist through graduate school?

Accordingly, these questions were investigated through in depth, open ended, and semi structured interviews. Additionally, the research questions were investigated through the collection of data received from the interview process, field notes, and recordings. Also, as the data was collected and transcribed, the data from each participant was compared and separated into categories using a computerized coding system.

Furthermore, the literature provided throughout this dissertation was included due to its relevance in the academic, athletic and of course the African American context of this study. This study attempted to investigate all facets of the purpose of this study including, the historical of African American athletes, experiences of African American athletes at PWI's as they pertain to athletics and academics, as well as African American graduate students.

The necessity of CRT was also explained as it pertains to this study. Within this study, the interest convergence principle within CRT was used. According to Donnor (2005) the interest convergence principle proposes that racial relief will not occur, unless it furthers the interests of the dominant culture, rather than those who subsequently suffered injustices. Many athletic programs at PWI's are indeed committed to the athletic success of student athletes, however, many African American athletes participating in college fall behind academically at higher rates than Whites in regards to academics (Agyemang, DeLorme, & Singer, 2010; Coakley, 2009; Donnor, 2005; Harris, 1973). For these individuals, the opportunity to earn a college degree or develop strong academic and transferrable skills in technology, hard sciences, law, and medicine is doubtful (Byrd et

al., 2011). Therefore, the application of the interest convergence principle is to examine the educational experiences of African American athletes is appropriate (Donnor, 2005).

Although the interest convergence principle within this study was utilized as the foundation to convey the major discourse between athletics, academics, athletic departments at PWI's, and African American male student athletes, this study attempted to reveal the positive influences and experiences of African American student athletes. Therefore, counter storytelling was a tenet of CRT utilized to give the participants a voice to relay their experiences. This tenet is a method of telling the story of those experiences that have not been told as well as a tool for analyzing and challenging the stories of those in power (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). The use of counter-stories in analyzing certain phenomena, provides faculty, staff, and students of color a voice to tell their narratives involving marginalized experiences (Hiraldo, 2010). The use of counter-stories allows for the challenging of privileged discourses of the majority, therefore serving as a means for giving voices to marginalized groups. In other words, this tenet helps us understand what life is like for others, and invites, the reader into a new and unfamiliar world (Hiraldo, 2010). All of the participants earned graduate and professional degrees. Also, they earned their undergraduate degrees in less than six years (the NCAA uses a six year scale to determine graduation rates). Also, this study does not agree with the literature that student athletes will not complete a college degree the produces transferrable skills.

Moreover, I also examined intrinsic and extrinsic factors of motivation. Motivation is internal; it guides and maintains behavior over time (Stipek, 2002). That said, there have been many researchers who have recognized that research, in regards to African American



student athletes, have focused nonetheless on the lack of willingness to participate academically, intellectual inferiority, and lack of interest (Simons, Van Rheenen, & Covington, 1999; Snyder, 1996; Snyder & Spreitzer, 1992). As stated earlier in chapter two, this has happened on a more frequent basis due to the fact that motivation is a key determinant in understanding achievement for African American student athletes (Graham, 1994). This study does not agree with the literature in regards to African American athletes and the lack of willingness to participate academically, intellectual inferiority, and a lack of interest. The participants in this study were well decorated academically and exhibited stellar commitment to their academics. The participants contended that the experiences they encountered transferred from one stage of their lives to the next. Although the participants had different backgrounds, many of the experiences emerged as well as merged into similar themes. Furthermore, the participants are all originally from urban and diverse settings.

### *Summary*

As the results of the study are presented, three research questions served as a guided this study. The personal characteristics which attributed to the former African American student athletes' motivation to obtain graduate degrees will be discussed in the next section (see chapter four for greater details). The participants exercised many forms of motivation, both intrinsic and extrinsic, but shared a commonality of being student athletes at PWI's as well as showing the persistence of maintaining a graduate degree.

Identifying and respecting their diverse perspectives was not considered as an option. Similarly, to maintain graduate degrees, the participants promoted words of

wisdom to those aspiring athletes, more specifically African American athletes, which assisted them in maintaining viable career options after their lives as student athletes. Therefore, the themes presented were necessary themes to highlight in an attempt to successfully lead them to attain graduate degrees.

*“Getting Ready for the Season” (Research Question One)*

**How do African American male student athletes who participated at PWI’s describe their athletic and academic experiences?**

In terms of family influence, the former student athletes involved in this study had a supportive family, who made it a clear initiative to excel academically. The level of support varied throughout the participant responses; however, all participants noted that their parents, grandparents, and surrounding families were involved in their academic lives respectively. All but one of the participants grew up with their parents. Nevertheless, as K-12 students, each participant was taught the value of academic excellence.

Winslow had a mother who had practical approaches to helping him succeed academically. Norris had a supportive family who encouraged him academically. While Nathan, although he noted that his grandparents did not know much of his academic work, ensured that he would go to school and receive the necessary help in order for him to succeed. Jacob also had a supportive family as well. Also, these participants made it a point to attend college because their families could not afford to pay for college. These experiences were all categorized as extrinsic motivational factors (see chapter four for further detail).

Therefore, the theme of family influence in this study agrees with the literature. According to Wallace (2013), there are many advantages associated with parental involvement in education. Furthermore, Becher's (1986) literature review on parent involvement found that there was "substantial evidence" which shows that students whose parents are involved in their children's schooling have increased academic performance and overall cognitive development. Students with actively involved parents are, by and large, more engaged in the classroom (Mo & Singh, 2008), more positive about school and learning (Shumow & Miller, 2001), more likely to enroll in advanced courses (Henderson & Mapp, 2002), and less likely to drop out (Rumberger, 1995).

Community influence/tradition was an interesting extrinsic form of motivation. The participants were proud to be part of a school and community with a reputable tradition of being athletically superior. This in turn motivated them to perform at high levels athletically. Furthermore, this tradition was initiated by the people who came before them; they had seen their coaches, brothers, uncles, past teammates, and others sustain this tradition, which again motivated them to succeed athletically. This theme was new when examining the literature in regards to African American male student athletes.

Community influence/tradition is a sub-theme that can be classified as an extrinsic motivator. All of the participants were either from the best athletic programs or surrounded by the best athletes and students in their K-12 careers. Thus, being in and around this environment, created an expectation of excellence. The participants noted that they were expected to perform well both athletically and academically. All but one of the participants noted that their athletic careers flourished in K-12 because they did not want to either fail,

let their community down, or be the sole reason they were cause of their team's failure. Therefore, community influence/tradition can be extrinsically classified. Therefore, this study produced new knowledge in regards to African American male student athletes and community influence/tradition.

Accordingly, the theme of community influence/tradition agrees with the literature in regards to its importance in the African American students. Communities play a vital role in the lives of African American students. The development of sound and constructive relationships between the school and the community are a necessary and natural function of a publicly supported institution in a democratic society (Green-Powell, Hilton, & Joseph, 2011). Also, communities often expand services for adolescents, support and opportunities for young people, while strengthening the school as a universally available public institution for all residents (Green-Powell, Hilton, & Joseph, 2011).

Competition is a sub-theme on high work ethic and can be classified as intrinsic motivation. Although this motivational factor did not surface as frequently and profoundly as community influence/tradition and family influence, it was still a key component in the determination and motivation of the participants. All of the participants were very competitive, albeit athletically or academically. As a result, this form of motivation led them to and through graduate school. Confidence was a motivational factor of the participants that surfaced in every part of the interview process. Unsurprisingly, the former student athletes were very confident in their athletic and intellectual abilities. Also, the student athletes rightfully deserved to be confident in these areas due to their athletic and

academic accomplishments. All of the participants have garnered great accomplishments, which prove their athletic and academic capability. Therefore, this study demonstrates that their athletic expectations agree with the literature.

*“This is Why We Work So Hard” (Research Question Two)*

**How does participation in collegiate sport influence the academic experiences of African American male student athletes?**

Strong work ethic emerged as a theme among all participants. The theme of work ethic initially presented itself in the life experiences of the participants as student athletes. Consistently, the participants referenced how work ethic was able to make successful in athletics as well as academics. Athletically, the participants were obsessed with not being outworked by their teammates and more importantly, their opponents. Work ethic, in this study, does not consist of just physical work, but intellectual work as well. The participants noted that they had a high work ethic physically; however, another significant part of hard work was performed through the mental part of athletics. Accordingly, this drive motivated them to sustain and persist through graduate school to obtain graduate degrees and viable career options. Moreover, the participants offered words of wisdom to younger aspiring athletes in regards to work ethic. In their experiences, hard work is a key factor for one to be successful in their endeavors. This was in deed a transferrable quality and trait that could not be foreseen in the pursuit of success. Accordingly, work ethic consistently surfaced as a transferrable motivating factor for all participants.

Next, code switching emerged as a sub-theme of social influences. Additionally, it was a skill that was developed by all of the participants. As stated previously, the participants come from very different backgrounds and different areas. All of the participants did, however, grow up around diverse populations. The participants noted that athletically, they were surrounded by African Americans. Academically they were surrounded by White students (in K-12 and at PWI's). Additionally, they noted that because of this, they were able to fit in socially and adapt to different groups and populations. This skill of being able to relate to different people surfaced in athletics in K-12 and collegiately, graduate school, and professionally. Through graduate school as well as their professions, this skill surfaced the most.

Therefore, code switching agreed with the literature in regards to this study. Orbe (1994) also note that Black men often learn how to interact with other cultures through interaction with others, observation, and trial and error. Also, the importance of learning "how to play the part" when interacting with both African Americans and dominant cultures to garner acceptance without showing too much social distance from African Americans to avoid being a "sell out." Orbe (1998) also notes that within various social spaces, co-cultural groups enact a variety of strategies to achieve preferred outcomes when interacting with dominant social groups.

*“Defining Your Legacy” (Research Question Three)*

**How do African American male student athletes describe the experiences that influenced them to persist through graduate school?**

The participants had different reasoning in their decision to attend graduate school. However, all of the participants noted that the best option for them and their career paths would be to attend graduate school. Hence, although the participants were from different areas and had different childhood experiences, the extrinsic motivators instilled by their families, created intrinsic motivation to sustain their commitment to obtain graduate degrees. Therefore, the participants made it a clear goal to make it through graduate school as well obtain a graduate degree.

The decision to attend graduate school may have been decided early on their life or simply by default to maintain eligibility, or because the participants were at a point in their lives in where they had to make crucial decisions about their future. In any fashion, graduate school was a main priority. Also, as graduate students, the participants carried over the values learned from athletics into their graduate experiences in order to be successful. Furthermore, the participants utilized the knowledge learned during this time in order to be effective in their current professions.

Strong work ethic was a motivating factor of these former student athletes; it strengthened their ability to persist through graduate school and obtain a graduate degree. Person and LeNoir (1997) state those who are doing well in sports have the motivation to continue through school without stopping along the way. Also, student athletes are

committed, given the involvement, persistence, unique characteristics, and psychosocial factors that affect African American male student athletes (Person and LeNoir, 1997).

Social influences are a form of extrinsic motivation and helped them persist through graduate school. The social influences of the participants in this study varied. The participants encountered various situations in where they were able to succeed as well as social situations that hindered them during the process of graduate school. Social influences helped them throughout their lives during K-12, as student athletes, as well as graduate students. The participants rarely indicated that there were negative social influences, however, the negative influences expressed during the interview process occurred in graduate school. Additionally, the negative social experiences that occurred to the participants could have possibly occurred due to race and athletic background. Jacob had the most negative social experiences. His experiences with his coaches and as a student athlete were in deed troubling. Although these experiences were not the best, he has turned them into positives; he has learned how to deal with adversity and accept criticism.

Although no participant indicated that a professor did not readily accept the student solely based on race or athletic background, Winslow, however, indicated that a professor did not treat him fairly or equally. On the other hand, participants did express great relationships with other professors. These relationships were a valuable motivating part of their persistence through graduate school. In these instances, the professors took heed of their positives and qualities in order for them to feel accepted.



Additionally, many of the participants were socially accepted amongst their surrounding peers. More specifically, the relationships formed with their graduate school peers assisted them in their success as graduate students. Graduate school, for the participants, was not an endeavor that could be completed solitarily. Thus, when surrounded by a group of people that could lift them up in times of need, was a benefit, more specifically, a great extrinsic motivator. Additionally, Walter expressed that he wanted to disprove racial stereotypes. Winslow was the only participant who expressed this experience, however, this is a major part of the study due to the relationship of African American student athletes attending PWI's. Accordingly, Winslow worked harder to disprove to others that he was not and would not fall into marginalized stereotypes.

### *Conclusion*

High academic expectations, high athletic expectations, and a strong work ethic were intrinsic motivational factors demonstrated by the former African American student athletes in this study. Family influence, community influence/tradition, and social influence were extrinsic motivational factors. Also, discipline and competitiveness were sub-themes of strong work ethic. Teamwork and code switching were sub-themes of social influence respectively. Although it is not a generalized formula, these factors proved to be a working base and a successful combination for the participants. The type of success demonstrated and attained by these individuals requires one to be persistent, competitive, focused, dedicated, and confident in order to persist to and through graduate school. All of the participants demonstrated such qualities.

The former African American male student athletes represented in this study were accomplished and diligent men who successfully obtained graduate degrees after their time as student athletes. One purpose for embarking on this research was to enlighten others of the positive qualities held by African American student athletes. In many instances, media, literature, and academe view this population negatively, more specifically, in an academic light. However, this study provided clear examples of the academic motivation and drive of these people.

What emerged was an understanding that these four men practiced many forms of resilience and persistence through both athletic and academic pursuits. They did not personally define themselves because of their degree, however, their experiences athletically and academically have formed and shaped them into their current beings. The participants were able to effectively articulate their experiences to younger African American student athletes as well. Collectively, the participants understood that their motivation came in all forms – including family background, tradition, social experiences, discipline, competition, teamwork, and graduate school itself. Their effectiveness as current professionals have come in collaboration and demonstration of the collective principles they have learned and acquired while being student athletes.

Accordingly, all of the participants gave words of wisdom to young aspiring athletes at the end of their interviews. Winslow gave valuable advice to young, aspiring athletes and academic success. His statements were made at the end of the interview, however, these statements surfaced as a major part of academic expectations. Winslow urged student athletes to make academics a main priority so they in turn can get a chance

to attend college. He specifically stated “because if you don’t do that, you don’t even give yourself a chance to go off to college, and if you don’t go off to college, you can hang up going to the NFL.” He then stated, “Fight the urge that your athleticism will overcome... any academic... deficiencies you have...” Concluding this advice, he stated:

“Think about the Russell Wilsons... the Kaepernickicks... those guys are crazy athletes, but they are no dummies. So the fact is... the competition has changed dramatically... no longer can you be a good athlete and think that’s good enough... because now there are good athletes who are achieving great things academically.”

Additionally, he advised older athletes to get degrees that will develop marketable skills. Use your resources in college to make the best of your opportunities academically. This was a profound statement because the participant is an NFL agent. Jacob had an extreme drive academically. He was highly motivated to excel in his academics. Just as the other participants indicated, this participant was highly successful academically. Also, Winslow advised athletes to be consumed with hard work. He noted that athletically, you have to be consumed with not being outworked or outplayed, because, he states “you really can’t control anybody else’s performance... but you can control how hard you work.”

Norris also offered words of wisdom to aspiring African American student athletes as well. He notes:

“No matter if you’re on the football team or... if you’re working at McDonald’s – the person that you’re working for... you want trust and if you’ve got a good work ethic and character... they can always depend on you to do the right thing, when they are looking or not looking... that trust... is going to always keep you

employed... it's going to keep you on the field... those things apply to whatever profession you have... and for work ethic in school... that's a no brainer... do your homework, study, make sure you're fully prepared... that's determined by work ethic."

Nathan notes:

"Be disciplined enough to reach that goal... hard work – life is not easy at all and sports definitely prepares you for that... because you're out there every day, when everybody is in the dorms or at home in the A/C and we're out there – its three o'clock... in the middle of the day and we're working... with full pads on... sweating and hitting each other... that's hard... not a lot of people can do that... that's why everybody can't go to college and play football... because it's tough."

Nathan also states "you can doubt, and you can come to a wall. But how are going to get over that wall – go over it... through it – however you're going to do it – just do it – get to the other side."

Often, I found myself reflecting on the interview process as I began to analyze their responses. In doing so, I found myself reflecting on the actual interviews and experiences shared by the participants. The words and expressions used to describe these experiences were more than just answers to questions. Rather, they were passionate memories which have created and shaped their realities and existence. Thus, their responses are pictures and passages through their life journeys.

The main focus of their stories is that African American male student athletes do possess great forms of motivation athletically and academically. Participating in athletics

may have been their ticket to get into the university, but it was not their way out. They were well educated. More importantly, most of the motivational factors which led them through graduate school, were in deed transferred over from athletics. In order to accomplish this, they had to reach within themselves and demonstrate the necessary qualities in which they believe in; thus, intrinsic and extrinsic motivation surfaced throughout their time as graduate students. The stories of the participants revealed that they had a burning desire to perform well athletically, academically, and professionally. Their stories revealed a high work ethic, confidence, competitiveness, family values, and most importantly, intrinsic and motivation. The participants were not regular, non-scholarship athletes either. They were the best – full scholarship athletes who were recognized as All-Conference and All-American performers athletically. In addition, these men were recognized as the best academically as well. Furthermore, the participants were purposeful and adamant in choosing graduate school as the best option for their careers. The stories of the participants also revealed a strong compassion for their African American people. All of the participants left encouraging words of wisdom not only for aspiring African American student athletes, but for the general public to take heed in. Many times, as stated previously, view this population in the likes of those are ultimately unsuccessful. Winslow made a statement in how society views African American men:

“The thought is to get an education, to better yourself means that on some subconscious level you have to sell out... that don’t say that... but... think that... that hurts us... nobody ever claims somebody is keeping it real if they’re a football player... you know he real. But if you’re a professional, doctor, or a lawyer, now

they want to question whether you're real or not... people just assume that you lose part of yourself because you start reading... but that's not the case... but people have adopted that mindset.”

This study has demonstrated, through these former African American student athletes that there are positive examples of African American males in which youth and student athletes can look up to.

I entered this journey without any knowledge or expectations from anyone or any institution. However, at the end of this journey, I have learned and realized many things about people, relationships, family, institutions, and most importantly, life. I can relate to these things because there is a brotherhood amongst African American athletes. This brotherhood of African American male athletes, entails the racialized notion of collectivism. The similarities and differences of the experiences of the participants produced masses of written and verbal contexts. Each of the participants served as an inspiration to myself and hopefully to those that read this dissertation. Their voices exemplified wisdom, motivation, courage, pride, dedication, and a great sense of belief in themselves. Throughout the interviews, I realized that I had traveled similar paths. We shared many of the same experiences, commitments, hardships, qualities, and ideologies. Most importantly, we exemplified the same persistence, dedication, and work ethic that has been exemplified through this study. Such motivation has given me the strength to endure 10 years of college; four as a student athlete and six as a graduate student. It is through this study that others can see the benefits of athletics and academics. The participants in this study have given me more drive and commitment to become a leader

for those who are marginalized. This experience has made me realize that not everyone will be on your side, however, that is exactly what has made this journey beautiful. As is the case in athletics, everything does not fall in place and everything does not go your way. But as the participants have demonstrated, persistence and hard work has led them to success.

### *Recommendations*

The following are recommendations based on the findings of this study:

1. Institutional commitment is imperative for student athletes, more specifically African American student athletes at all level. Each of the participants demonstrated that much of their success came from positive social experiences from peers, academic programs, departments, and professors. Exercising institutional commitment can be beneficial for all parties involved.
2. Athletic programs should promote the qualities of the student athlete, both athletically and academically at a higher rate. The participants in this study were well accomplished athletically; however, their athletic accomplishments were fueled in part by academic accomplishments and motivation.
3. Research on African American male student athletes should demonstrate more positive attributes and motivational factors. How motivation manifests itself depends on an individual and situational basis. Many African American student athletes demonstrate positive motivation athletically and academically, however, it is the duty of the researcher to disseminate these qualities and characteristics.

4. Athletic programs should exercise academic structure at a higher level. Although many athletic programs utilize academic services to assist student athletes, structure in a student athletes' academic life is imperative. The participants demonstrated structure in their academic lives, which in turn made them more disciplined and successful academically.
5. As professional athletes are exemplified in many collegiate athletic programs, successful former student athletes in other areas should be recognized as well. Many of the participants stated that there are successful African American men in this world who are not professional athletes. Therefore, in order to relay this message in a fashion that is conducive to student athletes, these successful former student athletes should be recognized on a more frequent basis.
6. More people of color, more specifically, African Americans should be represented in athletic departments outside of the athletic role. This study has demonstrated through a literature review and interviews that there is lack of African Americans in key decision making roles in collegiate athletic departments. Thus, a major key to recruiting and forming valuable relationships with these individuals can come from African American staff.
7. If African American student athletes do continue on to graduate school, graduate programs should include culturally relevant programs. Although a few of the participants were socially accepted in their graduate programs, many times, simply being African American can cause a feeling of discomfort and disconnect. This feeling is then magnified due to their status as an athlete. Therefore, graduate



programs should implement programs that are inclusive and responsive to African Americans, more specifically, African American student athletes.

8. African American student athletes should demonstrate their academic qualities through athletics on a more frequent basis. Many student athletes exemplify athletic motivation, however, due to their rigorous schedule and physical and mental demands from athletics, the easy route of giving the “bare minimum” is readily available to them, and accepted amongst family, friends, as well as athletic programs. This study has demonstrated, however, that through hard work and commitment, the same qualities exemplified in athletics, can be the difference in their academic lives.

#### *Implications for Further Research*

Based on the findings of this study, the following are suggestions for further research:

1. This study was conducted with four former African American males who attended PWI's during their athletic careers. It would be beneficial to include African American females to assist this study.
2. While this study was conducted with former African American student athletes who attended PWI's during their athletic careers, it would be beneficial to replicate this type of study with African American student athletes who attended HBCU's.
3. Although the participants in this study were athletically gifted and accomplished, they either did not make it to the professional ranks, or they did not want to make

it that far. This study would be interesting for those student athletes who have played professionally, or who have made it to the professional ranks.

4. This study exemplified the experiences of African American males. This study would be beneficial to all student athletes of color at PWI's.
5. There is an immense amount of literature on the academic performance of African American student athletes. However, it would be thought-provoking to discover more research on African American student athletes who become graduate students. This information would indeed shift the paradigm of the African American student athlete context in regards to academics.

It is my belief that each of the participants in this study will be an example to young, aspiring African American male student athletes. This study is a realistic example and demonstration of "life after sports." As our nation grows and sport becomes more and more global, it appears that these men have transferred the knowledge and values learned through athletics to demonstrate that athletics is not just about winning a game, it's about winning at life. This study has demonstrated that motivation comes from all forms of life; it is our duty as educators and leaders to bring it out in a correct fashion. Thus we ourselves need to demonstrate our motivation.

Lastly, although there is valuable knowledge rooted in the life experiences shared by these African American men, I am faithful in knowing that educators, administrators, and all athletic and academic stakeholders involved at the K-12, collegiate, and professional levels will disseminate not only this dissertation, but their own stories that contributed to their success as well as the success of others. Therefore, this research will

contribute greatly to the conversations concerning African American student athletes that have utilized their mind, body, and soul in order to succeed as an athlete and “life after sports.”

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**APPENDIX A**  
**CASE STUDY CONSENT FORM**

**Project Title: African American Male Student Athletes at PWI's and Motivational Factors that Influence Graduate School**

**You are invited to take part in a research study being conducted by Michael E. Rutledge, II, a researcher from Texas A&M University. The information in this form is provided to help you decide whether or not to take part. If you decide to take part in the study, you will be asked to sign this consent form. If you decide you do not want to participate, there will be no penalty to you.**

**Why Is This Study Being Done?**

The purpose of this study is to examine and interpret (Dillard, 1995) African American male student athletes at PWI's and motivational factors that influence advancement into graduate school. This research also highlights the existing experiences of African American student athletes within the context of sport and education.

**Why Am I Being Asked To Be In This Study?**

You are being asked to be in this study because you are an African American male, who has participated in athletics at one Predominantly White Institution and has entered graduate school.

**How Many People Will Be Asked To Be In This Study?**

Five individuals will be invited to participate in this study locally. Overall, a total of five people will be invited at one study site. The participants neither are current students nor are they affiliated with Texas A&M University.

**What Are the Alternatives to being in this study?**

The alternative to being in the study is not to participate.

### **What Will I Be Asked To Do In This Study?**

You will be asked to participate in an interview that will be recorded. Your participation in this study will last up to 45-60 and includes one visit/interview.

#### ***Example template:***

Visit 1

During this visit you will be asked to participate in an interview that will be audio recorded. Your participation in this study will last up to 45-60 minutes.

### **Will Photos, Video or Audio Recordings Be Made Of Me during the Study?**

The researchers will audio record the interview. If you do not give permission for the audio and video recording to be obtained, you cannot participate in this study. The audio recording will be transcribed at a later date. The information provided in the recordings will be kept confidential.

\_\_\_\_\_ I give my permission for audio recordings to be made of me during my participation in this research study.

\_\_\_\_\_ I give my permission for audio to be made of me during my participation in this research study.

\_\_\_\_\_ I do not give my permission for audio to be made of me during my participation in this research study.

### **Are There Any Risks To Me?**

This study will be minimal risk to you and your privacy.

Although the researchers have tried to avoid risks, you may feel that some questions/procedures that are asked of you will be stressful or upsetting. You do not have to

answer anything you do not want to. Literature about African American males and student athletes can be found that may be able to help you with these problems will be given to you.

### **Are There Any Benefits To Me?**

This study attempts to give a clear understanding of African Americans athletes in the realm of sport and education. Like many other walks of life, sport and education has been plagued by numerous occurrences of racial discrimination, prejudices, and racial inequality.

Throughout every era of American history, both past and present, race has played an important role in the acceptance, rejection, and expectations of African American athletes (Edwards, 2000). Furthermore, although some forms of racial discrimination have ceased, other forms of racism still occur in institutions of higher learning. After gathering information from sport and educational literature, it is apparent that American society has recreated a system that ultimately prevents large masses of populations, more specifically minority populations, from prospering in our society. American society is embedded with layers, complexity and unending questions. However, the major question when reading material, weather the subject is sport or education, is how can we change this problematic system? Current literature has expanded thoughts, opinions, and ideas that offer pathways for researchers to introduce possible solutions. By understanding our society and “keeping it real,” especially after deconstructing society from a CRT perspective, we can begin to enlighten and empower ourselves and society.

### **Will There Be Any Costs To Me?**

The time cost is 45-60 minutes. There are no financial costs.

### **When the study has no provision of treatment:**

If you suffer any injury as a result of taking part in this research study, please understand that nothing has been arranged to provide free treatment of the injury or any other type of payment. However, all needed facilities, emergency treatment and professional services will be available to you, just as they are to the community in general. You will not give up any of your legal rights by signing this consent form.

**Will I Be Paid To Be In This Study?**

You will not be paid for being in this study.

**Will Information From This Study Be Kept Private?**

The records of this study will be kept private. No identifiers linking you to this study will be included in any sort of report that might be published. Research records will be stored securely and only the primary researcher will have access to the records. Information about you will be stored in computer files protected with a password. This consent form will be filed securely in an official area. People who have access to your information include the Principal Investigator and research study personnel. Representatives of regulatory agencies such as the Office of Human Research Protections (OHRP) and entities such as the Texas A&M University Human Subjects Protection Program may access your records to make sure the study is being run correctly and that information is collected properly. Information about you and related to this study will be kept confidential to the extent permitted or required by law.

**Who may I Contact for More Information?**

You may contact the Principal Investigator, Dr. Norvella Carter, and/or me, about a concern or complaint about this research at 832-859-0399 or [mikerut39@neo.tamu.edu](mailto:mikerut39@neo.tamu.edu) or [ncarter@tamu.edu](mailto:ncarter@tamu.edu).

For questions about your rights as a research participant; or if you have questions, complaints, or concerns about the research, you may call the Texas A&M University Human Subjects Protection Program office at (979) 458-4067 or irb@tamu.edu.

**What if I Change My Mind About Participating?**

This research is voluntary and you have the choice whether or not to be in this research study. You may decide to not begin or to stop participating at any time. If you choose not to be in this study or stop being in the study, there will be no effect on your student status, medical care, employment, evaluation, relationship with Texas A&M University, etc. Any new information discovered about the research will be provided to you. This information could affect your willingness to continue your participation.

**STATEMENT OF CONSENT**

**I agree to be in this study and know that I am not giving up any legal rights by signing this form. The procedures, risks, and benefits have been explained to me, and my questions have been answered. I know that new information about this research study will be provided to me as it becomes available and that the researcher will tell me if I must be removed from the study. I can ask more questions if I want, and I can still receive services if I stop participating in this study. A copy of this entire consent form will be given to me.**

---

Participant's Signature Date

---

Printed Name Date

**INVESTIGATOR'S AFFIDAVIT:**

Either I have or my agent has carefully explained to the participant the nature of the above project. I hereby certify that to the best of my knowledge the person who signed this consent form was informed of the nature, demands, benefits, and risks involved in his/her participation.

---

Signature of Presenter Date

---

Printed Name Date

**APPENDIX B**  
**INTERVIEW PROTOCOL**



This is an interview with \_\_\_\_\_

Conducted by Michael Rutledge

The purpose of this interview is to explore the academic and athletic experiences of \_\_\_\_\_ as they relate to motivation factors that contributed to his enrollment into, as well as his completion of a graduate/professional degree.

### **Family**

1. When and where were you born/grow up?
2. What was the educational level of your parents and immediate family?
3. Were they athletes? If so, what sports did they participate in?
4. What are/were your parents' occupations?
5. How did your family influence you athletically and academically?
6. Would you describe your family as an athletic family? If so how?

### **Other Individuals**

7. How did the surrounding community (i.e. coaches, schools, teachers, others, etc.) influence you educationally and athletically?

### **Early Experiences as a Student Athlete Prior to College**

8. How big of a role did athletics play in your life?
  - a. Would you consider yourself athletically gifted?
9. How big of a role did academics play in your life?

10. Were academics ever a concern? Why or why not?
11. What were your athletic and academic accolades?
12. Did you expect to compete collegiately? Professionally? If so, why?

### **Choosing Your College**

13. Describe your recruiting process?
14. Was academic success/athletic success a concern? If so, why?
15. What factors played a key role in choosing your undergraduate institution?

### **Student Athlete Experiences in College**

16. Describe your experiences as a student athlete.
17. How did you decide on your major?
18. Did participation in sports enhance your academic performance/motivation or vice versa? If so, why?
19. How did your coaches/advisors assist you academically?
20. What activities outside of football did you participate in?
21. What were your athletic and academic accolades?

### **Graduate School**

22. When did you decide that a graduate/professional degree was an option for you?
23. What influences did educators (i.e. teachers, professors, coaches, etc.) play in your decision to attend graduate school?
24. Where did you attend graduate school?

25. Why did you choose that particular university?

**Life after Graduate/Professional School**

26. What are some of the experiences you learned from athletics/school that you are applying now?

27. Is there anything that you would like to discuss that I did not ask you about?